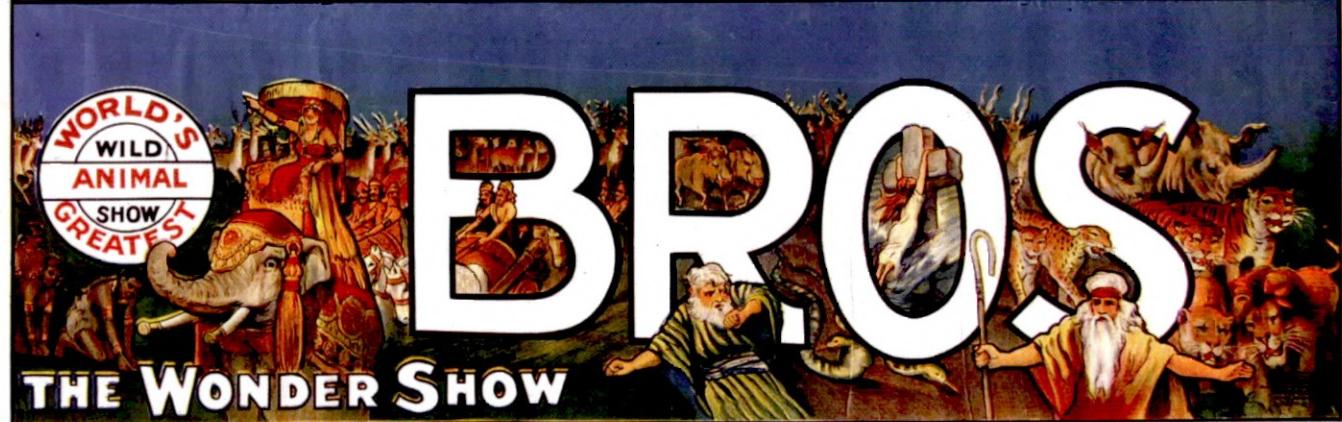
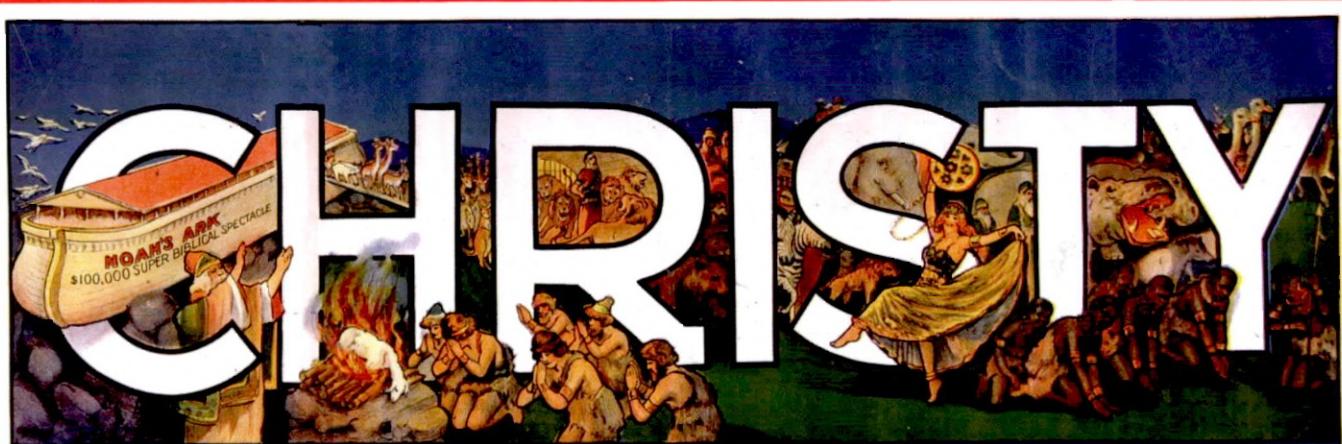


BANDWAGON

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

May-June 1996



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Vol. 40, No. 3

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FRED D. PFENNING, JR., EDITOR

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THIS MONTH'S COVER

A series of articles on George W. Christy's life in show business begins in this issue.

In 1925 Christy commissioned the Erie Litho Company to print about a dozen specially designed lithographs for his twenty car circus. Each design stated "copyright 1925 G. W. Christy."

One of the 1925 one sheets appears on our cover. The original is in the Pfening Archives.

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NEW DIRECTORY AVAILABLE

A new 1996 directory of Circus Historical Society members is now available. Active CHS members can receive a copy by sending \$1 for postage to **Bandwagon**, 2515 Dorset Rd. Columbus, Ohio 43221.

1996 CHS CONVENTION

The 1996 CHS convention, July 15 to 17 in Baraboo, Wisconsin, has already drawn a large number of registrations. It is not too late to register for this grand meeting. Details of the convention appeared on page 34 of the March-April **Bandwagon**.

For last minute information or registration call Fred Dahlinger, convention chairman, at (608) 356-1030 after 6 PM CST.

The registration deadline has been extended until July 10.

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"Accurate details of the circus operating are historically correct. Well worth reading." Fred Pfening, Jr. in the *Bandwagon*.

"Reviewer feels he learned more about a circus than he wished to know. Twice as good if it were half as long." John S. Phillipson, retired English professor at Akron University, in *Ohioana Quarterly* magazine.

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CHRISTY AND HIS WONDER SHOW

PART ONE

By Fred D. Pfenning, Jr.

Each man has his time--each his allocated period in which to experience life and store up memories, make his mark and register his identifying impressions upon those who cross his path.

But some live twice. Some rare man packs in two full careers. Then in the end the aged man looks back, looks beyond the recent and familiar, pierces the midpoint, and peers again into that forgotten first existence.

Thus George W. Christy looked back, looked across four decades to see the earlier career in his other forty years. Christy, the millionaire, landlord, Texan, mayor, Rotarian and booster, an old man in the comfort of his mansion, recalled how it was before.

As the misty past came back into focus, the burden of years dissolved. An awesome transformation took place. The decades were repealed. Infirmed knees found the old strength. Step and pace and stride were invigorated. The uncertain whine was gone, replaced by a firm baritone which spoke with authority. Shoulders squared and the man stood tall again. Age's watery stare turned into sharp and snapping eyes that reveled in this reliving.

With the guise of an ancient frame swept away, one saw and knew the man of the another time. One met the trim fighter, the accomplisher, the man of action in a world apart. A loving old bear became an aggressive tiger.

Vocabulary fell back. Proper language gave way to the cryptic terms of a circus trouper, a showman's expressive tongue.

But the other changes of were of greater import. The likable Babbit-style booster, the official quipper of the business men's club--all that was gone. The

righteous and proper Presbyterian had vanished, replaced by a fighting extrovert four and six decades younger and afraid of nothing. There stood before me George Washington Christy, circus man and nobody's foil. There he stood the fighter and grifter. He told me all about it, about Christy and his Wonder Show.

The above was written by Tom Parkinson after he met with the circus man in the twilight of his life. Parkinson visited Christy four times between 1972 and 1974. During these interviews he examined scrap books, copied historic documents and photographs, and tape recorded the old showman's memories.

Christy in a 1908 photograph. Circus World Museum collection.

Christy had written about his adventures in the outdoor show world and planned to publish his memoirs, an effort that bogged down. The notes were passed on to Parkinson who unfortunately never finished his attempt to bring Christy's life to print. All the notes, documents, and tapes were acquired by the Circus World Museum after Parkinson's death in 1993. The author has melded that archive and additional material into this article.

When John and Ida Christy's son was born on George Washington's birthday,

February 22, 1889, in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, they named him after the first President. When George was twelve his father set him up with a horse and wagon vegetable sales route. By fifteen he had been a bill poster, electrician, and stage hand at the local opera house. At sixteen he became an amateur magician.

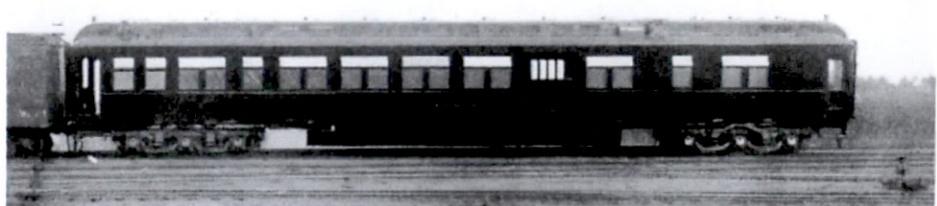
Young Christy saw a future in the motion picture business. About 1906, he purchased a Pathé projector from Paris, France, and began his new vocation in the Buffalo area. The machine had no take up reel and the projected film was collected in a cloth bag. A white sheet was hung in halls and rented rooms, as a screen. Within two years the young entrepreneur had built motion picture theaters in the Buffalo area and formed a film rental operation.

In 1908 Christy married Laura Highlands of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in Niagara Falls, New York. That same year he met George Brown, who was apparently a showman, and who knew where a circus was for sale. The sheriff in New Philadelphia, Ohio offered Christy the equipment of the show, whose title has been obscured by history, and he bought some wagons and tents cheap. He had them shipped to his Springville, New York theater, part of an old cheese factory, which the Mayor owned. The Mayor was a painter and he flashed it all up. By spring he was ready with the Christy Circus with Brown as manager.

The show opened at Hamburg, New York in 1908 at a local fair and continued with a string of county fairs. The operation traveled on eight or nine wagons. It was a one ringer and the band was made up of black musicians. At nineteen, Christy was the youngest circus owner in America.

In 1909, Brown continued to run the circus while Christy converted empty retail stores into theaters and then sold them. One late-season engagement was for the Ancient and Honorable Order of Gobblers, one surmises a fraternal group, in Atlanta. The

The combination sleeper-baggage car used by the Christy motion picture company. Circus World Museum collection.



show finished the season with a \$4,000 profit, a decent return, but one that the inexperienced show owner thought was below par. After being convinced by Brown about the advantages of operating a circus in the South, Christy shipped the equipment to Atlanta in late 1909 to organize a gilly show traveling on its own rail cars.

Two sleeping cars were located in Columbus, Georgia. Brown left with \$2,000 or \$2,200 (Christy recalled both figures) of Christy's cash and mileage books to buy them. Several days later Christy received a phone call from the sheriff in Columbus saying Brown had been found dead in a brothel. No money was found, only the mileage books. That's how they located Christy.

In 1910 young Christy had no manager and little circus experience, only a lot of wagons and tents. Jittery over the loss of both



place the train stopped. There were no theaters in some of the small towns. In one hamlet he set up in an undertaker's parlor where a dead baby was lying in its casket behind the screen. He took in \$40 that night, about average in those days for a one man movie company. He was snowed in on the Canadian border in 10 below weather for eight days as the trains could not move.

Handbill used by the Christy motion picture company. Pfening Archives.

Christy recalled: "Up in North Dakota during the winter of 1910 I was showing moving pictures in theaters. I was distributing 'tonight' dodgers featuring the pictures for that night. I handed an old Norwegian fellow one and said 'are you coming to the moving picture tonight.' I managed that much in Norwegian. But the old man simply said, 'Oh no, I seen one

ling can. He also added sound effects. Three musicians played during the movies, and Christy himself lectured during the picture. He later said he introduced the first talking motion pictures. His wife Laura helped with various sound effects. Among his film features were ones about the 1871 Chicago fire, the building of the Panama Canal, and the Carl Hagenbeck animal exhibition.

He organized another circus, using movies as the after show. Sometime during the year, perhaps (Christy's memory wasn't the best), he bought his first railroad car, using it to haul around a vaudeville troupe in the upper plains. Whether the circus traveled on the railroad track or behind horses is uncertain.

1912

About this time, Christy organized a motion picture theater supply company called the Christy Amusement Enterprise which sold Powers, Edison, Lubin, Optograph and Moticograph projectors along with "electric theater supplies, announcement slides, advertising slides, carbons and film cement." The letterhead stated: "We will furnish a complete moving picture theater for you. You don't need any experience. We furnish everything including the electric sign. We will install any machine you may desire and learn (sic) you to operate the same without any extra charge. We advertise the opening date, and run the first three days performances."

He may have had a troupe out called Christy's Big Vaudeville and Trained Animal Show, although definitive evidence of such a concern is lacking.

Christy in front of his marquee in 1913. Circus World Museum collection.



Bill stand advertising Christy's movies in Elkton, South Dakota in 1912. Circus World Museum collection.

his money and his manager, he nevertheless sent out an advance agent named Armstrong to book one day stands.

He routed the show along the rail line from Atlanta to Williamsburg, Kentucky, losing money, Christy later claimed, because Halley's comet, which appeared that year, had everyone thinking the world was coming to an end if it hit the earth. He closed the circus and went to Cincinnati where he had stored a movie projector and equipment.

During the winter of 1910-1911 he went to the Dakotas and other plains states to present movies, playing every

once.' Those were the days when show business was really young." He later recalled his Dakota venture netted \$4700, big money early in the century.

1911

Always looking for something new Christy, around this time, had an optician grind a special wide angle lens that allowed him to project film from the back of the screen. To make the screen transparent he wetted it down with a sprink-





Christy's ten piece band in front of the side show around 1915. Circus World Museum collection.

1913

Christy seems to have had a one car gaily circus, possibly called Christy's Big New Hippodrome on the road, traveling at the rear of passenger trains.

1914

The January 24 *Billboard* mentioned the Christie & Leonard Shows, G. W. Christie manager. Nothing is known about this venture.

The 1914 season was a great success for the Christy Hippodrome Shows, winding up in Galveston, Texas in December. Christy was coming up in the

This newspaper ad was used by Christy in 1916. Ted Bowman Collection.

At 2 and 8 p. m.

Sinton, Saturday, Dec.
16th.

circus world and he joined the Showman's League of America as its 38th charter member.

Christy advertised in the September 6, 1914 *Billboard* for various performers such as jugglers and black face comedians to play theaters, "traveling in our own railroad car." Some published route indicates that the show played five day stands in theaters.

1915

The May 15 *Billboard* contained a Christy Hippodrome Shows ad wanting a bandleader. The company was in Minnesota in May and Illinois in late September and early October.

1916

The April 1 *Billboard* published a Christy ad wanting musicians and performers for a two car show. He also wanted a boss canvas man and a seat man for a number two unit. The April 8 issue reported Christy had bought an unnamed Eastern dog and pony show and would have two shows out. The number one unit was to be practically new. The second unit, managed by H. R. White, was to use the equipment from the 1915 outfit, and play three day stands.

Christy Hippodrome Shows, the first unit, opened the season in Galveston, Texas and returned to quarters there at the end of December after a long season that took the show to Canada.

The September 2 *Billboard* reported that Christy planned a No. 3 show, a Jessie James Company, apparently a theatrical endeavor. No evidence has been discovered about the tours of either the number two circus or the Jessie James show.

Christy later recalled: "While playing Valentine, Texas the show was unloaded and as the tents were being erected a lot of shooting was heard south of downtown. The townsmen told the show folks that Pancho Villa was fighting down that way. To



The marquee and one ring big top around 1915. Circus World Museum collection.

top things off a fire erupted. Since the show was set up near the railroad station it was in the path of the fire. Every man in town, including all of ours, started tearing down buildings in the path of the fire. This stopped the fire, but much of the town was in ruins." So was the Christy show's business. He later said, "We never saw Pancho Villa and we left town that night a tired bunch of demolishers."

The old man continued: "Marfa, Texas was the next stand and it did terrific business. There was a big Army camp there. The tents were crammed with soldiers and every one had a big time. That was until the show gave an after show for men only in a smaller top. It was a hootchie-kootchee performance. The soldiers ate it up. At the finish six or eight soldiers picked up the kootch girl's stage while she was dancing on it and carried it on their shoulders right outside and up the street. That meant trouble until the MPs and enough show people rescued the girl."

1917

The February 3 *Billboard* mentioned that the Christy Hippodrome Shows was wintering in a government stockade in Galveston where Prof. Golden was breaking domestic animal acts. U. S. Tent was building a four pole big top.

The Christy baggage and sleeping cars used in 1916. Pfening Archives.





A 1915 bill stand for Christy's Hippodrome Shows. Circus World Museum collection.

The two cars were a sleeper and a tunnel car. The tunnel car had doors on one end with everything loaded through the doors. The other end of the car had a small door. The cross cages and animals were crowded into one end, cross loaded and double decked on planks above the menage horses. The black laborers slept in the tunnel car's possum bellies. The canvas, jacks and seating were loaded in the cages, with the small animals carried in shifting dens. The show had two knock-down wagons pulled by menage horses to gilly equipment to and from the lot. About forty ponies were used in pony drills and to pull the cages in a parade. The ponies were double decked over each other. The dogs and goats were fastened together on a long chain to lead to the lot.

The big top was a sixty with three 30s; The side show was 40 by 40 feet. The dressing tent was 20 by 30 feet. The performance was given in twenty-eight foot canvas rings. The stock was kept on a picket line out in the open, rain or shine.

The May 29 *Billboard* published this advertisement: "Want musicians and working men, boss canvas man for side show, light man, seat man, pony groom, man to make side show openings and take full charge of same. Can always use performers that double brass, ten canvas men, bass clarinet and trombone for big show band. Will sell all concessions to single man. Also have up town pit show ready to open and will give good talker percentage proposition on same. Christy Hippodrome Shows, Valentine, Nebraska, June 1."

In September Christy looked for fall

bookings when he advertised: "Free acts, Fair secretaries in Oklahoma, New Mexico and Texas, why not buy the Christy Hippodrome Shows outright and give your patrons the big show program, consisting of over twenty acts, as one big free attraction. Big troupe of ponies, dogs, goats, clowns, aerialist, acrobats, jugglers. Neatly uniformed band and a big pit show containing twenty cages of animals. Think this over. It will bring you business and would be a novelty. We can only play a limited number of fair engagements, We will not play fairs on percentage basis. This is not a carnival. Christy Hippodrome Shows, Wellington, Colorado."

The show played a long season, until at least December 22 when Orange, Texas was shown. In all, it covered 12,108 miles of railroad track. Christy was called to war, being offered a commission of Major in the Quartermaster corps.

1918

Christy said, "I had to sell that show quickly, and I did for peanuts to Elmer Jones . . . lock stock and barrel. I took my suitcase and boarded a steam ship for Key West and on to Philadelphia and a visit home, before going to the Junc-

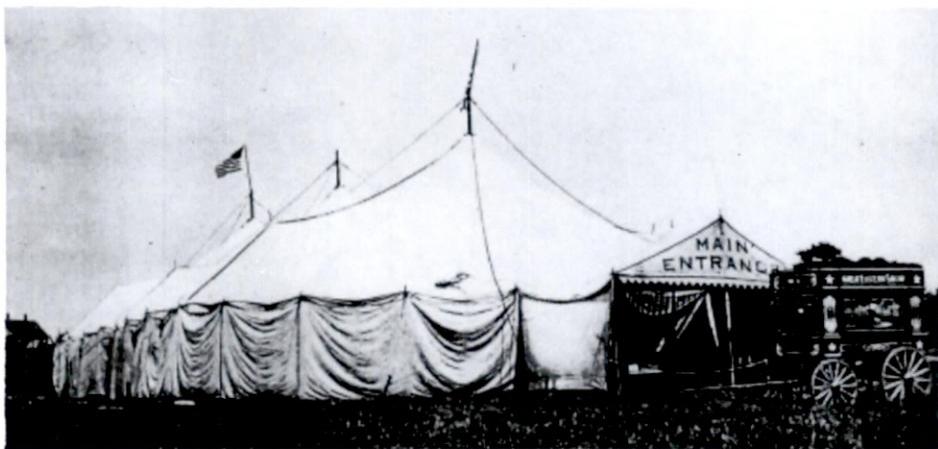
tion, Kansas military camp to start my training, with a promise of a Major's commission in the Quartermasters Corps. I got off in Key West, Florida and wired my father. He quickly replied saying he had just received word that I was to ignore the call. Was I sick. No circus and now no commission either. So my wife and I figured nothing else to do but take a vacation."

The sale contract to Jones was dated February 5, 1918. Christy agreed to sell Jones the entire Christy Hippodrome show including title to use until Christy was exempted or discharged from military service for \$5,000. Included were one Pullman car, one baggage car, dogs, ponies, goats, one four pole round top with three thirties and all paraphernalia for said tent including seats, lights and side show tent. Also part of the deal was the inventory of Christy Hippodrome Shows paper. It was understood that the Christy title and paper could be used until G. W. was out of the Army and back in the circus business.

Within a few weeks an ad appeared in the *Billboard*: "Wanted quick-for Christy's Hippodrome Shows. To open March 2 in Galveston, Texas. Bandleader and musicians, to complete 12 piece band; would consider organized Italian band of 10 pieces. Want boss canvas man that has two car experience. Also want a good seat man, working men, cook, side show and pit showmen and Oriental dancers. No time to dicker. State lowest in first letter. Alex Jones, care of Hotel Panama, Galveston, Texas."

Alex Jones, Elmer's brother, was in charge of the show. Former Christy employees Clarence Auskins, general agent, and Jacob Friedman, side show manager, were with the Jones outfit.

The former Christy ticket wagon and big top on Elmer Jones' Great Eastern Show in 1918. Circus World Museum collection.



Jones used the Christy title until G. W. opened his new circus in June. The Jones show title was then changed to Great Eastern Hippodrome Shows.

This Heber Bros. newspaper ad was used by Christy in 1919. Ted Bowman collection.

After hearing from his father, Christy and his wife boarded a train for Chicago, carrying the money he had received for the circus in a handbag. They lived in a theatrical hotel where they met many other show people. Christy visited the Rhoda Royal Wild West Show, which was playing Chicago lots in the spring, during a big wind storm. He remembered seeing tent stakes and rope hanging over the street car lines. All the working men walked off and Royal asked Christy to help out in loading the show. He said, "I ruined a new suit, but I was glad I could help out another showman in distress. After it was loaded Royal said, 'What on earth can I do, no boss canvas man. No one here knows how to put this wild west canopy together and get it up. Would you please help me set up tomorrow morning.' Of course I had to say yes. The result was that I set it up for three weeks, and never took a nickel for my services."

Christy saw a *Billboard* ad offering a two car dramatic show for sale in Little Sioux, Iowa. He jumped on a train and bought the show, quickly advertising for an advance agent, performers and a band. The 1918 show was advertised as Christy's Tent Show because Jones had all his former Christy Hippodrome paper. This show opened near Omaha, Nebraska on June 15.

The 1918 *Billboards* listed dates for Christy's Tent Show at Killdeer, North Dakota, July 20; St. Paul, Minnesota, August 21; Newcastle, Wyoming, September 2; Lake City, Colorado, September 16; and Alamosa, Colorado, October 1 and 2. The season closed on December 31.

The October 12 *Billboard* reported:

Coming! Lindsay 13 Saturday, Sept. 13 Two Performances 2 and 8 p.m. 1919 HEBER BROS. GREATER SHOWS



A Grand Tented Exposition, Presenting a Remarkable array of Super Educated Animals: Horses, Ponies, Dogs, Goats, Monkeys, and Troups of Sensational Aerialists, Acrobats, Gymnasts, and a host of Real Laugh-Making, Mirth Provoking Clowns.

SEE The Big FREE ACTS AT THE SHOW GROUNDS

when he was introduced to Frank Gabriel, now a prosperous roundup promoter. Frank did a roping act with the Christy Show ten years ago. Mrs. Christy received a beautiful pair of diamonds from G. W. this week.

"A big shipment of snakes and a pair of Rocky Mountain black bears were added to the pit show collection while the show was up 11,000 feet above sea level. Yes, everything is high up here: our railroad moves run as high as \$427 a day. The fifteenth member of the Christy show was called to camp September 17 when Jay Hargott (trombone player) was notified to report to Ft Riley, Kansas. Our band is still small, but we hope to fill it up soon. George Day, our boss canvas man, says he doesn't care anything at all about playing those mountains again—the ground is too hard. George says the mountains come up too close to the surface. In Ouray, Colorado, it was impossible to find a lot, so we were compelled to erect the big top over the main line track, one telegraph pole, one side track and one old time switch eight feet high, as well as occupying all of the depot platform and one street,

"Christy Bros. Hippodrome Shows finally arrived at Alamosa, Colorado on October 1 where the equipment was parked and the entire show moved onto narrow gauge (D. & R. G.) cars for a tour through the mountains.

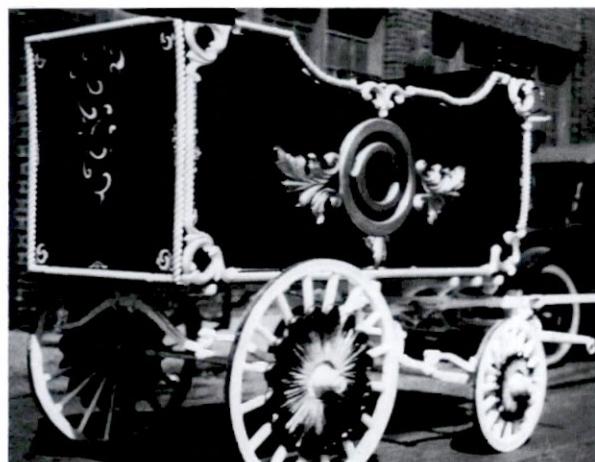
"The Christy Show was the first to make this trip for seven years and it sure was some tour as well as some business. Two engines were required to move the train every day and several moves required three engines to climb the mountains. At Durango we turned several hundred people away and canceled the next stand, remaining over for one more day when we packed them to the doors again. Manager Christy had a pleasant surprise sprung on him here

and there was no room for the side show at all.

"Everybody spent a few hours visiting Box Canyon at Walsenburg, Colorado, October 1, hunting silver, gold, lead and other ore specimens. Oscar Goodhardt spent all his time hunting bass while some of the folks bathed in the Hot Springs. California Frank owns a ranch close to Ridgeway, our next stand, but we failed to see him there. Mrs. Rialdo, Mrs. Palmer, Myrtle Rhoades, Mrs. Barlow and Miss Barlow donned their bloomers and decided they would climb to the top of a mountain just to see what was on the other side. They started from the cars after breakfast and got back just in time to catch the train Sunday night, limping and tired. They still claim they got half way up, but the natives say it can't be done. Logan Hearn is handling out the latest war maps, but he says the 'boys' are, driving the Huns back so fast that his maps get stale on his hands. We are now boosting the Fourth Liberty loan and G. W. intends to buy one bond every day as long as the drive runs. The Red Cross was holding an auction sale on the street corner recently and G. W. happened to pass. He stopped long enough to buy everything offered for sale (one wagon load of goods). Let's forget war taxes, etc. it's all for the good cause, but let the amusement loving public pay us a little more for our tickets. Everything is going up, so must our tickets or our bank roll will. We expect to stay out at least until Christmas and don't foresee any obstacles so far to prevent it. Well, boys don't forget to buy at least one bond this time. We want the world to know that showmen are not slackers."

The show encountered problems in Colorado after switching to a narrow

The Beggs Wagon Co. built this small bandwagon for Christy in 1919. Pfening Archives.



gage rail line. All of the equipment was moved to the narrow gage cars, which were very short and narrow. The center big top poles had to be lashed to the top of a coach. Christy said, "We finally had to get a third engine, and from that time on they charged me for three engines. But what could I do. Well the only thing I could think of was to raise the price of admission, and I did, to \$1.00. This worked in one town. Then the next town we got into we were met by the sheriff and the usual crowd. They never had a circus there. We had advertised a 75 cent admission. The sheriff said, 'You don't unload here, we heard you are charging a dollar to get in.' Sensing trouble, I said there must have been some mistake, we only charge 75 cents. And naturally everything was ok. We played to packed houses. I raised the price again later on the narrow gage railroad that was charging us about twice as much as we had agreed to pay on our contract. You don't make a railroad mad at you, way up in the mountains, with no other way to get out. Durango, Colorado was our best stand. And we were glad to get back onto our own railroad cars again."

1919

The January 4 *Billboard* contained this advertisement: "2 Car Circus For Sale Cheap. Or will sell anything separate. 62 foot baggage car, four truss rods, possum belly, new steel wheels; Tanglewood calliope, mounted on miniature bandwagon; 20 x 55 foot khaki pit show top, with white walls, no poles \$75; 70 foot Baker & Lockwood dramatic top, with one 30 or 40 foot middle, waterproofed, no wall or side poles, but has steel center poles, \$300, stored in Chicago; one lot of pit show banners; 20 x 30 tent, no patches, \$40; two sets of band uniforms, parade banners; bass drum; ponies; goats. I am taking out a larger show, reason for selling. Christy Shows, Galveston, Texas." It is not known how much of this was sold.

G. W. tried a different angle to produce a return on his equipment when

he placed an advertisement in the February 8 *Billboard* which read: "Want partner for two car show, either dramatic or carnival. Party must have ability to organize and manage same without my assistance and must invest some money. I have cars, tents, etc. State age, experience and how much you can invest. I have other show that takes my time. G. W. Christy, Galveston, Texas." This gambit appears to have been unsuccessful as there is no evidence that Christy had put out a second show that year.

Mollie Bailey, Grand Dame of the Texas circus community, died on October 2, 1918. On January 18, 1919 Christy bought the Mollie Bailey two car show, paying \$1,200. The equipment was not used until 1925. Christy later told of the Bailey show: "The Mollie Bailey show moved on a coach and a baggage car. It was the pride of Texas way back about 1900. It was managed by Aunt Mollie Bailey and was well known throughout the state. It was said that she owned a lot in every town she visited. I do know definitely she did buy some. When the show closed in 1918 I bought it, the two cars, the animals, etc. I think there was a pony act, a goat act and a dog act, all quite old by that time. Our trainers brought the ponies into the ring barn at Beaumont to start training them into larger acts. The very first one in, being used to a small show with one ring, just reared up and fell over dead in the ring."

As Christy prepared for the 1919 season he was badly in need of lithographs because of a paper shortage which persisted after the war ended the previous November.

The Wonderland side show on Heber Bros. in 1919. Pfening Archives.



Everett James and his band in Wallia, Texas on December 22, 1919. Pfening Archives.

Heber Bros. was a small wagon show out of Columbus, Ohio that toured the Midwest for at least twenty years before closing following the 1917 season. The Heber title had no significant value; however, when a large cache of its lithographs became available at a cheap price from a litho company, Christy bought them. He, like many other circus owners (Floyd King was famous for this), used the title on available lithographs as the name of a circus until the paper was used up. The show opened in March. All *Billboard* references to the circus called it Christy's Hippodrome Shows with no mention of the Heber Bros. title.

The February 8 *Billboard* reported: "Christy Hippodrome Shows busily preparing for coming season. Opening date not yet decided. To be larger this year.

"Everything is now buzzing around winter quarters of the Christy Hippodrome Shows at Galveston, Texas. Veo Powers arrived from Pennsylvania, and is busy from 7 a.m. until night daily, working on a new monkey act and a new goat act, as well as the old pony numbers and his famous White Models posing act, featuring Morning Glory, a magnificent snow white Arabian horse.

"Our carpenter shop has already turned out all new seats, poles and props. Manager Christy is now out on a purchasing tour and has already secured an extra large Bactrian camel, a new sleeping car, nine monkeys, a number of Gentry Bros. miniature cages and Col. J. C. O'Brien's 82 foot steel under frame baggage car. Col. O'Brien had this car built several years ago at a cost of \$10,000 and it sure is the only baggage car in the show business that has ever been equipped with a (real) steel under frame. It is also said that the price Mr. Christy paid for this

car is more than any kind of a show car has ever been sold for.

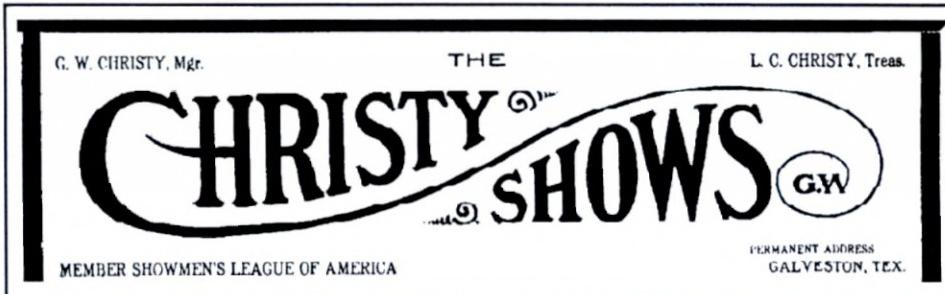
"The show will be considerably larger this year than before and quite a number of the old people will again be with it this spring. The Barlow Family is recuperating in the Seawall City, awaiting the call. Bobby Zenaro is working overtime on a new free act, rigging, wardrobe, etc. Charles Nelson is cooking up some new clown gags. One in particular will sure make a hit. Charlie is training a giant Ibex goat, weighing about 250 pounds, to butt him in the gag. We are all anxious to see that clown number. Everett James will direct the band this year, while his family will work in the big show program. Palmer and Palmer are playing a few independent vaudeville houses while the show is in winter quarters. Jack Levere will have charge of the side show. Jake Friedman will be busy this season handling the big pit show and his Oriental Palace which will be new from banners to stakes. S. V. Campbell has been engaged as bridge manager and will have entire charge of the billing, with a capable crew of bill posters.

"The show will open early, but the exact date has not as yet been decided. Most of the people are already engaged with the exception of the working departments.

"C. R. Shelton will have all the privileges, stands, etc. and is now at his home in St. Louis, preparing for a real long season. Mr. Shelton will have three assistants with him. Fishing is fine; the boss caught forty big ones one morning before leaving for the East. Ducks are also plentiful, the weather is fine and there is no place like Galveston."

The Beggs Wagon Company of Kansas City built a small band chariot with a carved "C" on each side for use on the 1919 show.

Christy opened the season on March 1 in Rosenberg, Texas and remained in that state until April 7 when it played Deming, New Mexico. The show then



This 1919 letterhead was printed in red with a green border. Pfening Archives.

went through Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Idaho and Montana.

Christy played a number of stands in Canada, crossing the border at Coutts, Alberta on June 1 after playing at Sweet Grass, Montana. A Canadian customs form listed: 2 railway cars, sleeper No. 10 and baggage car No. 2; 1 calliope wagon; three dray wagons; seats; 1 miniature sewing machine; four tents; set of lights for show; 22 trunks and boxes; 6 alligators; 2 boxes of snakes; 2 lions; 1 puma; 1 camel; 10 monkeys; 5 goats; 2 mules; 1 horse; 3 ponies; 1 deer; 1 small bear; 8 musical instruments; kitchen utensils; dishes; complete set of bedding for sleeping car; 1 small camera; 1 small safe; office equipment; 1 typewriter; chairs; desk; 1 set of pony harness; 1 bass drum; 1 small oil stove; poles; ropes; dog collars; mats and paraphernalia. The total declared value was \$10,000. and the duty paid was \$125.

A separate customs list itemized the concession equipment. It included 1,440 toy air balloons; 1 case of cheap jewelry; 10 cases of Cracker Jacks; 5 cases of pop corn; 300 pounds of peanuts; 700 pounds of advertising matter, including show tickets; and 10 pounds of peanut sacks for a total value of \$321. The duty was \$82.70. The show left Canada on July 23 after playing Bannerman, Manitoba.

Christy wrote: "On June 24, 1919 we

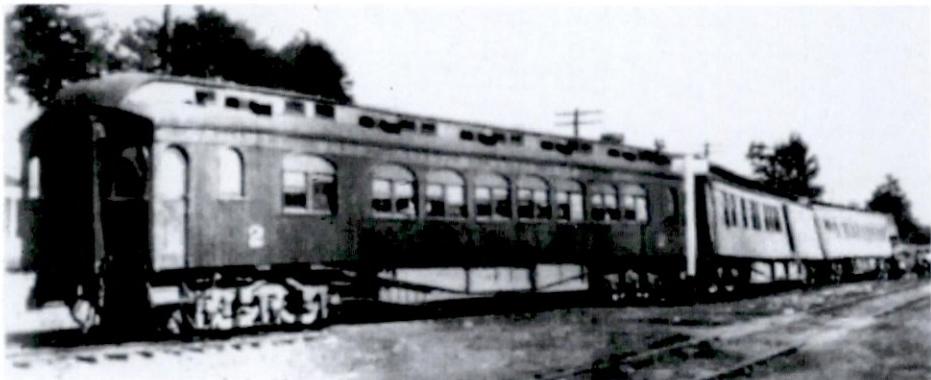
These five baggage wagons were built by the Beggs company for the 1920 season. Circus World Museum collection.

were on our way to Hudson Bay Junction in Canada. The railroad had some trouble with its tracks. So we were getting later every hour. It finally developed we could not reach Hudson Bay Junction before dark. The people had never seen a circus, so they were asking the depot agent to wire us asking us to show no matter how late we would arrive. They agreed to wait, and advised us a large crowd was waiting. Some had come in a day ahead with the kids. This was the Northern tip of Saskatchewan. We arrived about 8 p.m. The citizens lined up around the vacant spot by the railroad. We unloaded, erected the big tent and seats and started the performance about 10:30, to a packed house. The second show was over at 2 a.m.

"We packed up and were on our way to the end of the line, a branch of the Canadian National. It ended at the farthest point [North] in North America for any railroad. There were no roads in LaPaaS, the next stand. There was only one street around one block of business places. When we arrived we were greeted by hundreds of Esquima Indians. They had come from many miles up Hudson Bay way on sleds pulled by dogs. I noticed the way they fed their Husky dogs. Near the show grounds by a stream they had ropes or chains staked across some rifles. The dogs were tethered by the chains in the water, where they stood watching for large suckers, eating fish for their meals.

"There was only one automobile in the town. An enterprising fellow was charging fifty cents a ride around that





The Christy three car train in 1919.
Circus World Museum collection.

one block. He was doing a terrific business as most of those Indians had never seen a auto either.

"The town and railroad were built on muskeg, a sort of moss many feet deep. I was very uneasy about our seats falling on account of the insecure footing. When the elephants danced the whole town shook [in reality the show had no bulls, but Christy was never one to allow the facts to intrude on a good story or phrase]. The seats were packed all day long. We just kept repeating one show after another. Most of the Indians would buy a ticket each time and go in and see the same show.

"That same season I heard of a wonderful fishing spot. So I routed the circus into it, just so I could get some real fishing. I fished all day and sent enough fish back to the show to feed the entire personnel for several days. But the show did not make any money at that stand. The town was too small for a circus. But the fishing was great."

The June 28 *Billboard* stated: "Christy Bros. Hippodrome Shows will continue on tour until January and

The small light plant built by Beggs in 1920. Pfening Archives.

will then again go into winter quarters in Galveston, Texas.

"This was the first circus to invade Canada this year, entering the Dominion from Sweet Grass, Montana on May 31. Business has been big since opening on March 1, with the exception of about one week in Arizona.

"The show has had only two rain days in fourteen weeks, one in New Mexico and one in Montana. The hottest weather was experienced in Blyth, California, where the temperature reached 120 degrees. Two weeks later snow was encountered in Mackay, Idaho. There is plenty of money in Canada and it looks like there will be plenty of shows after it. A Shetland pony was born on the train at McCammon, Idaho."

Christy related: "On October 15, 1919 we set up on a nice day in Hunter, Arkansas, a distant point on the railroad. We played to very good business as this was an isolated spot where circuses rarely played. But during the afternoon performance I learned that the entire railroad personnel had gone on strike as of that moment. No trains would move. The railroad was shut down by the strike.

"Here we were in a one street town with no way to get to the next town. We were to go the M. K. & T railroad. So I started negotiations with the same train crew that brought us in. Would they consider a payoff as a bonus from us and move our train out that night? After much talk, enticing and bribing we finally had an agreement, more or less a secret, with that crew to move the show.

"We felt a good trick was turned. We loaded up, the engine came as arranged and we started for the next



Young Harry James doing a back-bend in front of a Beggs baggage wagon in 1920. Pfening Archives.

town. The train reached a spot several miles out of Harrison where the tracks were on a pretty steep up grade. Then, zing, the engine wheels just spun and that was all. The tracks were soaped. Evidently some of the strikers had heard we had a plan to move regardless of the strike. They had greased the track on that grade with soft soap. We were stuck. But not for long. In the old circus spirit of never say die, I merely sent every available man out with rags, shirts and whatever we could scratch up quickly and wiped that soap off the track for what seemed to be a mile. Once again we were on our way.

"The sheriff received information that strikers were going to blow up some bridges. So he came along on a hand car with deputies. He preceded us past the last bridge. Another rough spot was licked in Arkansas."

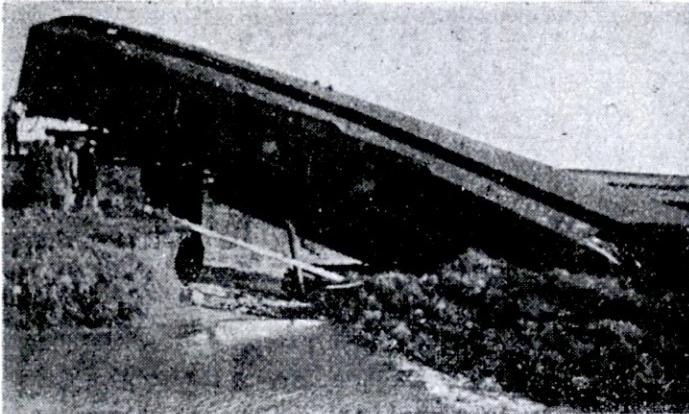
The season ended at Freeport, Texas on December 29, one of the best stands of the year according to the January 10, 1920 *Billboard*.

1920

On December 16, 1919 Christy bought an elephant, a drum menage horse, two hybrids, two Great Danes, a blue bull and all of the trappings and props belonging to the Cordenia act from the John Robinson Circus in West Baden, Indiana for \$3,200. One thousand dollars was paid at the time of the sale with the balance due on or about February 1, 1920. Christy was moving up in the circus world, owning his first elephant.

The second baggage car was ac-





This photo of the wreck in Lethbridge appeared in the June 19, 1920 *Billboard*. Pfening Archives.

quired to provide room for the elephant and new wagons which including a small light plant wagon and five box type baggage wagons built by Beggs. The baggage wagons were lettered "Christy Shows." The parade was replaced by a free act.

The February 14 *Billboard* reported: "Christy Bros. Greater United Shows winter quarters are humming with activity these days. Carpenters, painters, electricians, trainers, seamstresses, etc., are turning out new paraphernalia. An entire new outfit of canvas from horse tent to marquee has been ordered and already shipped. New show wagons, now being built at the Parker factory, are excepted here February 12.

"The train has been wired and will be electric lighted throughout. Superintendent Quinlan has purchased all new steel stakes and a new set of steel runs recently. Lynn Taylor has charge of the animal barn, Harry Montague the elephant barn, and Sam Bennett is working on animal acts. The show lost a fine big camel recently as a result from the kick of a horse. The lobby of the Panama Hotel reminds one some Chicago hotel lobbies these days, as a crowd of showmen gather there every night to talk it over. Bill posters, agents, clowns, bosses, side show men, performers and musicians are all waiting the call, which will soon sound. The Christy show will open March 6 and close January 1."

Sid Kridello, a clown on the show, provided most of the information to the *Billboard*. He was in error in reporting that new wagons were being built at the Parker factory as Christy had actually ordered six new wagons from the Beggs Wagon Company in Kansas City. The light plant and baggage wagons were small enough to be loaded in one of the baggage cars.

CHRISTY BROS.

United
Greater



Wild Animal
Exposition

A portion of the herald used by Christy Bros. Greater United Wild Animal Exposition in 1920. Pfening Archives.

The March 13 *Billboard* had the following article: "Everything is humming around the winter quarters of the Christy Bros. Greater United Shows at Galveston, Texas. Sam Bennett is working out the animal acts daily and has them in tiptop shape. One of the features of the program this season will be a mixed animal group consisting of an elephant, horses, two hybrids and two Great Dane dogs. Everett James will again direct the band and will have fifteen musicians. Mrs. James will be one of the features of the big show performance, including her iron jaw specialty. Doebeck the tramp juggler will return." Publication of this report was delayed as the show had already opened.

Christy Bros. opened at Rosenberg, Texas on March 6 and remained in that state for nine weeks before playing Clayton, New Mexico on May 8. Christy then moved quickly through Colorado, Wyoming and Montana to enter Canada at Magrath, Alberta on May 24.

Christy wrote Harry Bowman, his contracting agent, on March 30 from Goldwaite, Texas: "Business has been good. I felt sick when we came into Bur-

nett, it looked like the worst kind of a grave yard and it was. But the fact that they had no circus for so long made them come out. Then too the boys had a good country billing and that is sure what brings them in. We done \$700 there and this town was also about the same and you know it looks dead enough and the Hall show never got a matinee at all and they had very little at night from what we can learn in town. So I am tickled to death. And I am pleased with the way you are handling things. Mack [McCorkhill, advance car manager] is doing fine, also the boys (billing crew). I hope we can keep them all together all season. Wish you and the boys could all drop back sometime soon to see the show. If you get a chance on a Sunday without loosing any valuable time run back, I don't mind you using a little car fare. The lots have all been all right, except in Burnett it was im-

A Christy side show opening in 1920. Pfening Archives.



possible to use that one, so we got the railroad lot. The other was too small and hard to get into. So from now on we are in a different part of Texas so just go up and see the country and tell them we are coming, but don't engage any \$15 license, tell them the manager will look them up on show day and take care of them. I know we can get by in lots of these towns for \$3 to \$9. And it all helps.

"I think [Elmer] Jones is coming west on the Texas Pacific, he was in Clarksdale on April 1. I am sure we can beat Backman [Backman-Tinsch Circus] to the T. P. I sent a man to Chicago tonight to get two trained horses I just bought. I can place two aerial people, single or double, and a lady manage rider. Also one clown and two musicians on trombone, and clarinet and alto. If you know of any let me know. Could also place one more driver for a big team. Otherwise all filled up nicely. People like the show.

"It is sure a good flash, cars, wagons and everything. I wish Elmer could take a peek at it on a good nice lot. Be sure to give all newspapers write ups.

"I want to make that swing out of Pacos and up to Clovis then back up to Clovis, then back to Canadian and north to Oklahoma, for a little. You can suggest a route that way. Forgan Branch is a dandy and not been touched for a long time. How would you go to the Canadian border if you were me.

"Well here's hoping business keeps up like this, and that you don't have too hard a time keeping AHEAD of them ALL.

"Thought it best to cut Dublin as Backman would be there a day ahead

One of the Beggs baggage wagons being loaded in a tunnel car in 1921. Circus World Museum collection.



Christy Bros. Great United Shows And Wild Animal Exposition



Trained Dogs, Ponys, Monkeys, Elephants, Zebras, Sheep & Goats

LOTS OF FUNNY CLOWNS. GRAND FREE EXHIBITION UP SIDE DOWN ZENALDO WILL GIVE A THRILLING SLIDE FOR LIFE. DOWN A 60-FOOT INCLINE, STANDING ON HIS HEAD ON A MINIATURE RAIL BEARING AUTOMOBILE AT 1 AND 7 P. M.
WILL EXHIBIT AT--

Poteau, Monday, Oct. 25

1920
SEE RAJAH LARGEST ELEPHANT IN CAPTIVITY.

Newspaper ad used by Christy in 1920. Ted Bowman collection.

of us and this way we get ahead of him or day and date. I don't care about that in case you ever do find out you have to play and date or expect it just go around and rent all the lots in town, and pay \$1 down on them, balance on contract payable at wagon."

Bette Leonard, who was with the show in 1920, wrote about it in the April 15, 1945 *Bandwagon*. She was mixed up, however, on the year and called it the 1919 season. She noted: "The opening stand day and dated the Dixie Minstrels. Owing to the extreme heat the show gave few matinees playing the southern part of Texas.

"Everett James was the band leader. His son Harry, later a well known big band leader in the 1940s and 1950s, was three years old at the time. Mabel James did ironjaw, a sailor perch act and a black face act in the after show. Fay James did a ring act, contortionist act, swinging ladder and single trapeze. Jake Friedman was side show manager and featured Mlle. Carmen Du Coin along with Frank Farrell, who did a vent act.

"Admission to the big show was 75 cents and George Christy asserted many times that he had twenty-nine \$1,000 days, which in those days was an exceptionally good day.

"I rode my Arabian horse up town each day with the band and sang two songs in concert. This ride up town replaced the usual parade."

On May 23 the circus entered Canada at Coutts, Alberta. The Canadian customs form listed one sleeper and two baggage cars; one large tent, complete with seats, poles etc.; nine small wagons; five large show wagons; one ticket wagon; one cat rack; ten alligators; four small tents; three electric light plants; eleven dogs; one Unaphone; six horses; four ponies; two mules; two sheep; three goats; two zebras; one bass drum; eleven musical instruments; one elephant; one llama; one bear; one puma; three leopards; one lynx; one fox; one coon; one macki; eighteen monkeys; four anteaters; fourteen uniforms for the band; three sets of double harness; two saddles; one lot of pony trappings; one lot of side show paintings (banners); one Smith typewriter; and twenty-six trunks. The total duty for one month was \$125.00. This was a lot of show for two baggage cars.

The June 12 *Billboard* reported: "Christie (sic) show in wreck. Laborer loses life at Lethbridge. Many shows in western Canada.

"A white laborer was killed and a Negro roustabout injured, in a wreck occurring at 2:10 a.m. on May 26, when the baggage car of the Christie (sic) 3-car circus broke through an irrigation canal bridge on the Canadian Pacific Railway south of Lethbridge. The high water in an irrigation ditch had undermined the bridge. The engine got over the bridge safely, but the tender and the end of the baggage car crashed through.

"Little damage was done to the contents of the car, and the loss of life was caused by the laborer being crushed by a wagon being thrown forward. The



George W. Christy in the early 1920s.
Circus World Museum collection.

show will possibly lose two days on account of the accident.

"In addition to the Christie (sic) circus, which has contracted a route through Alberta and Saskatchewan, Buller's Dog and Pony Show, also a three car outfit, has a route through Western Canada. Cole Bros. is also heading in this direction through North Dakota, and it thus probable that E. H. Jones will again have two shows in this territory.

"Al G. Barnes has contracted a route through British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. The show comes in at Kingsgate June 6, reaches Lethbridge the 10th, Calgary 11th, Edmonton 12th, then East into Saskatchewan with Regina 21st and Brandon the 24th.

"This will be the fourth year since a big show visited Western Canada, Patterson-Gollmar Bros. being the last.

"Unfortunately, however, conditions are not so good this year as last, owing to a bad crop failure last fall in Southern Alberta and Southern Saskatchewan."

Regarding the wreck Christy recalled: "While moving west after our first stand in Canada at Magrath we engaged a special train to haul the three cars, as the regular train would not have gotten the show in on time for the matinee. About four a.m. I was awakened by a sudden crash stop. I ran out of my stateroom in my pajamas and jumped off the car into a field covered with clover. The train was wrecked. One car was lying in a small river. The water was flowing

over a third of the car. The rear end of the car was badly smashed. Knowing that there were many men in the car, I fainted dead away. My only thought was that they were all dead. I revived quickly to survey the wreck and see what happened. The high water had washed out the underpinning trestle of the Canadian Pacific leaving only the rails and ties. A goat act and a dog act in the cellar of that car were partly submerged, but fortunately none were lost. By that time the entire troupe was out on the ground. They found one man dead, twenty injured, but none too seriously. I appointed one man to escort the rest through the fields to a hotel. At the time we were paying passage for twenty-eight people. But there were actually at least fifty people with the show. Knowing that the railroad would quickly send claim agents I had to get rid of all but twenty-eight people. The railroad sent an emergency work train and the other two cars were pulled back to division headquarters at Lethbridge. A system car was sent back to the wreck scene and loaded the equipment from the wrecked car. In two or three days the show was again on its way, with system cars. I wired the Pullman Company and bought a new car that was shipped to Lethbridge where the Canadian Pacific rebuilt it just like the wrecked car."

After playing 19 days in Alberta, 12 days in Saskatchewan and 15 days in British Columbia the circus returned to the United States at Northport, Washington on July 23. The route then took it through Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, and Oklahoma. The show entered Arkansas at Greenwood on September 18. By November 1 the show was in Arcadia, Louisiana with the closing stand of the tour at Galveston on December 21. During the season the show made 250 stands in 13 states and 3 Canadian provinces.

Late in the season Christy was thinking seriously about enlarging his circus.

On October 27, he wrote William P. Hall: "Have you any flat cars for sale.

"Am in the market for the following goods: 1 large elephant, 1 zebu bull, 1 kangaroo, 2 hyenas, 1 llama, 2 small baggage wagons 2 small canvas wagons, 2 small seat wagons, 1 advance car 1 stock car, 4 or 5 flats, 10 sets of double harness, 8 head of draft stock. a set of steel runs and 6 small cages."

1921

The Christy operation continued on three cars in 1921. The show was reported to be carrying 17 wagons, nine of which were miniature cages. Christy used a device to hoist the small cages in the air so they could be double-decked in the tunnel car.

This short report appeared in the February 26 *Billboard*: "Christy Bros. Greater United Wild Animal Shows are busy in winter quarters, with 26 men all winter, including seven painters, under the supervision of Jack Burke, throwing the red, yellow and gold; four carpenters, ripping and hammering away on new wagons, cages; two electricians, getting the three old electric plants and one new one in shape in a brand new powerhouse wagon; three sewing machines, humming away on new material; four trainers, working in the ring barn, which is equipped with three training rings and an arena. Such is the excitement at the Christy winter quarters in Beaumont, Texas, as the show is preparing to open the coming season here on February 26."

Another report appeared in the March 26 *Billboard*: "Christy Bros. Greater United Wild Animal Shows opened the season at Beaumont, Texas, February 28. The big show program is under the direction of B. B. Dennis.

"Display No. 1, three mounted lady

The Orchestmelchor wagon was purchased for the 1922 season. Circus World Museum collection.



singers, Gertrude Dennis, Mabel James and Pearl Gibbons.

"No. 2 Aerial Martins and George Grink, Roman rings.

"No. 3 Shetland ponies, worked by B. B. Dennis and Prof. Golden.

"No. 4 Clowns.

"No. 5 Dancing in the lion's den by Miss Glenn.

"No. 6 Flying perch, J. Martin, M. Zeldo and Mabel James.

"No. 7 Angora goats, worked by Merritt Belew and B. F.

"No. 8 Clowns.

"No. 9 Lee Smith, hand balancing; M. Zeldo, head balancing; J. Martin, contortionist.

"No. 10 Capt. Dennis troupe of African lions.

"No. 11 Joe Dobeck and Great Bink, comedy jugglers.

"No. 12 Clowns.

"No. 13 Concert announcement.

"No. 14 Posing acts by B. B. Dennis, Mrs. Dennis and Robert Cook.

"No. 15 Mabel James, butterfly iron-jaw act.

"No. 16 Riding dogs, monkey and ponies by B. B. Dennis, Prof. Golden and Merritt Belew.

"No. 17 Performing black bears and troupe of monkeys.

"No. 18 Clowns.

"No. 19 The Binks, wire act.

"No. 20 The Cadona act, performing zebras, elephant and dogs.

"No. 21 Concert announcement.

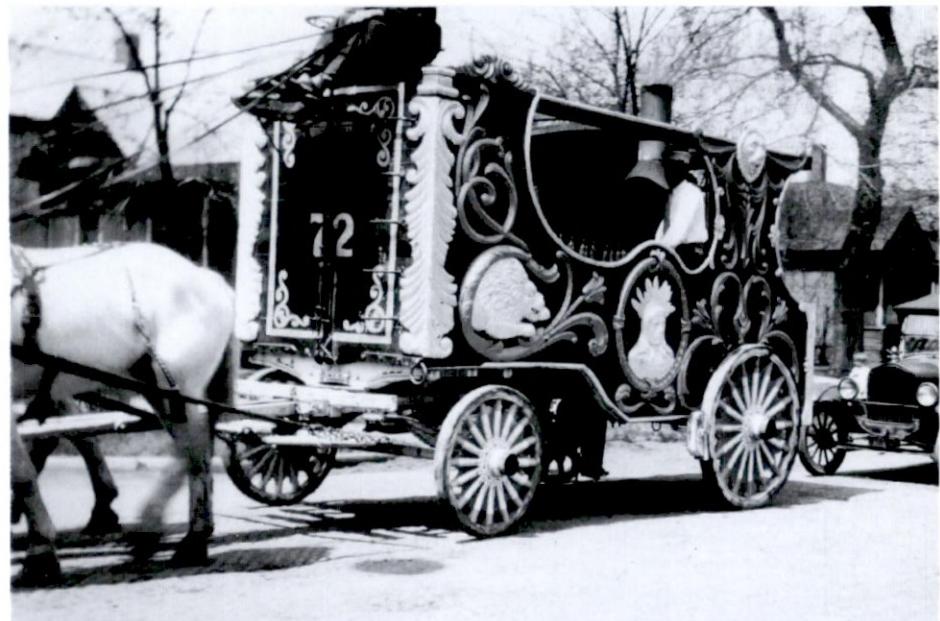
"No. 22 Menage acts by Pearl Gibbons and Mabel James, Gertrude Dennis, Robert Cook and Merritt Belew.

"No. 23 Christy Bros. troupe of twenty performing dogs.

"No. 24 High leaping grey hounds.

"Prof. Everett James has the band composing fifteen members. Little

This 1922 tableau wagon, with the clown band on top, advertised a hippo, which Christy never had. Pfening Archives.



Harry James, four years old, does a musical act in the concert. George Vasell, heavyweight wrestler from Chicago, is featured in the concert.

The side show, a 50 foot round top with three 30 foot middles, is under the direction of Jake Friedman and acrobatic performance is given by Prof. Nelson and his trained baboons; Prof. McKeenan, sword walker; Madam Mazie, musical act and mind reading; Ethel Delmar, Hawaiian dances; and the three Musical McCammons, Scotch band, furnishes the side show music. Nine cages of animals are also displayed in the kid show.

The pit show is handled by Joe Quinlan and is gayly bedecked with a new banner front. The attractions include Jolly Eva, fat girl; baby lions, monkey circus, snake and alligator pit. C. Shelton has all the privileges. He recently received a new candy wagon. Red Lampkin has the reserved seat tickets, Electric light is furnished by the show's own power house."

The former Louella Forepaugh Fish Wild West steam calliope was added late in the 1922 season. Pfening Archives.

The May 21 *Billboard* published a list of the Christy staff: "Christy Bros., proprietors, G. W. Christy, manager; L. C. Highlands [Mrs. G. W. Christy], treasurer; J. C. Admire, general agent; Walter McCorkhill, special agent; Milton Jehu, excursion agent; Jake Friedman, side show manager; B. B. Dennis equestrian director; J. Haley, general superintendent; C. Shelton, superintendent of privileges; Everett James, musical director; Charles Lumpkin, superintendent of reserve seats tickets; C. McNEY, superintendent of canvas; Jack Morrison, train master; H. A. Speedy, boss hostler; E. Richardson, superintendent of commissary; Harry Miles, superintendent of lights; Frank McCoy, superintendent of props; H. J. Cook, superintendent of ring stock; Floyd Meister, superintendent of baggage stock; C. C. Gibson, side show canvas boss; Walter Hodgson, pit show canvas; George Evans, 24 hour man; Lynn Tyler, superintendent of elephants; Charles Nelson, boss carpenter; L. Smith, checker-up; Charles T. Mason, legal adjuster; and Merritt Belew, announcer."

Christy pulled off a rarity when his show played two towns in one day three times during the season: on July 15 at Harlem and Chinook, Montana; on July 25 at Chewelah and Marcus, Washington; and on July 27 at Curlew and Molson, Washington, playing one town in the afternoon and the other at night. This routing was possible due to railroad schedules.

Christy advertised a complete three





A four pony hitch pulled the air caliope wagon in the 1922 Christy parade. Joe Bradbury collection.

Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho and Montana. It crossed into Canada to play Princeton, British Columbia on July 29. Christy came back to the United States at Sumas, Washington on August 9. It then moved through Montana, Wyoming, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana and closed in Sour Lake, Texas on November 29.

Christy advertised a complete three ring circus for sale in October. The ad said: "Can be seen on road now. Always a money maker. Only reason for selling am buying a larger show. Christy Bros. Wild Animal Circus, Hot

A 1922 Christy Bros. newspaper ad. Ted Bowman collection.

**CHRISTY BROS.
GREATER UNITED WILD ANIMAL EXPOSITION**

50 NEW ANIMAL ACTS
AND FEATURES
50 FINEST HORSES EVER BRED
MOST DARING ANIMAL TRAINERS

12 FEROCIOUS JUNGLE BREED PERFORMING LIONS 12
SIG. MARCO DEFYING ALL LAWS OF GRAVITATION WITH HIS BIG FREE EXHIBITION DAILY AT 1 AND 7 P.M.
THE SUPREME ACHIEVEMENT IN MODERN AMUSEMENT CREATION
3 RINGS AND A BIG STEEL ARENA 3
BROUGHT HERE ON OUR SPECIAL TRAIN OF DOUBLE LENGTH CARS

Saturday, July 8, Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin

Springs, Ark., Oct. 24; Fordyce, 25." The Little Barnum meant what he said this time as he would have a flat car circus the following season.

1922

Christy had made real money with his two and three car shows with the Canadian tours being especially profitable as the graft was wide open in the Western Provinces. At age thirty-three he made his move into the big time by taking out a 10 car show in 1922. It consisted of one advertising car, two stock cars, three flats, one baggage car and three coaches. By then he was wintering in a large factory in Beaumont, Texas.

Christy took a big step up by hiring Bert Rutherford, a well known railroad circus general agent. Rutherford remained with Christy for the next ten years and became one of his most trusted employees.

The old Barnum and Bailey Orchestra tableau was bought from the Horne Zoological Arena Company of Kansas City. It became the No. 1 bandwagon. He also bought additional baggage wagons from Beggs.

Christy wrote William P. Hall on January 6: "What can you quote me on fifteen head of dapple grey draft stock, none over five years. I offered \$500 for that Campbell, Bailey & Hutchinson caliope, have you a better one for sale. If so what price?

"I am in the market for camels, elephants and any hay animals that lead, zebras, llamas, aoudad goats, water buffalo, etc.

Christy recalled his first flat car circus: "When I organized my first ten car show I bought my sleeping cars from the

Pullman Co. in Chicago. The wagons came from different sources. The first bandwagon came from Horne & Company, which was an animal dealer and circus equipment broker in Kansas City. The steam calliope came from James Patterson in Paola, Kansas. He had bought the wagon from Gollmar Bros. Several other wagons came from Patterson. Others came from Mugivan and Bowers at West Baden, Indiana where they wintered their Hagenbeck-Wallace circus. I also bought a lot of harness and some big dapple grey parade horses from them."

The January 14 *Billboard* published this report: "Beaumont quarters a scene of activity.

"All around the winter quarters the Christy Bros. Wild Animal Shows have completed their much needed rest following the past season of forty and one-half weeks, and are beginning to hum in all departments with preparations for the new season.

"Charles Nelson, with a force of mechanics, is busy overhauling all the baggage wagons and cages in addition to building several new dens and tableau wagons. The cars are being over-



This cage appeared in the 1922 Christy parade. Circus World Museum collection.

hauled at the Southern Pacific shops, which are situated less than a block from the winter quarters.

"Bert Dennis is at present in Central Texas purchasing new baggage and ring stock. Several new ponies arrived at quarters last week and the work of breaking the new stock is to start immediately. A large shipment of wild animals is due this week and they will immediately be placed in the big new animal acts.

"An entire new spread of canvas has been ordered, and the carpenter shop is busy engaged in building several additional lengths of new reserves and blues. Mrs. Carlton and assistants are turning out some wonderful wardrobe to be used in the wild animal spectacle which is to open the show. G. W.

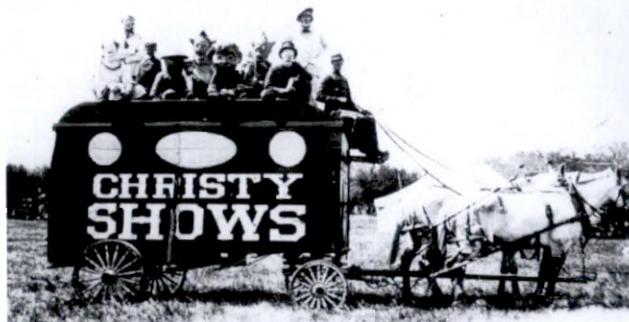
Christy is sparing no expense in preparing his organization for the road and a great treat is in store for the amusement-loving public on the established route of the show."

Walter McCorkhill, the advertising car manager, supplied this report in the January 28 *Billboard*: "Additional equipment purchased for coming season.

"G. W. Christy is on an extended business trip East and North attending to the shipping of new cars and paraphernalia to winter quarters. Four new flats arrived last Monday and additional equipment is expected daily. Five male lions arrived last week and Bert Dennis has added them to the lion act, which now consists of eleven monster specimens. Great headway has also been made on breaking the new eight-bear number. Work will start in a few days on a mixed group of leopards and pumas. Many new sensations will be incorporated in the big animal acts.

"Jake Friedman arrived last Tuesday from Chicago and St. Louis where he has been spending the past few weeks since the closing of the show.

"Charles Parker has arrived from



Clowns on a baggage wagon ready for a parade in 1923. Pfening Archives.

Paola, Kansas to take charge of the paint shop. Gold leaf will be used on all tableau wagons and dens. All work around the quarters is rapidly nearing completion and everything will be in readiness before the opening which will take place during the first week of March."

The staff in 1922 included: G. W. Christy, manager; Bert Rutherford, general agent; W. F. Kutz, press agent; Jake Friedman, side show manager; B. B. Dennis, equestrian director; Everett James, band director and Walter McCorkhill, manager of the advertising car.

The show opened the season in Beaumont, Texas on March 11, remaining in that state until April 24 when it entered Oklahoma at Frederick. The route then took the company



through Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Dakota, Missouri and Illinois. It entered Arkansas at Corning on September 21. The closing stand was in Eunice, Louisiana, on November 26. Additional Texas dates were canceled because bad weather.

The Christy show, like many others of its time, carried grift. The ticket sellers also practiced the art of short changing. Christy related: "We were showing in Electra, Texas on April 21, 1922. A fellow kept staying on the show grounds until the tents were about gone. Finally he moseyed up to me and said, 'I'll give you \$20 if you just show me how that fellow that sold them tickets outside changed my twenty dollar bill into a one dollar bill.' Evidently he had been swindled by one of the reserved seat ticket sellers, a thing that will happen. In another case a colored man bought a reserve seat ticket and had a \$20 bill changed. He was quickly ushered up to a seat and the candy man came along selling peanuts. He said he would take one. Reaching into his pocket he pulled out a dollar bill and said, 'My oh my there is a dollar I never

The Christy midway in 1923 showing ramp for the free act. Joe Bradbury collection.

knew I had.' Certainly not what had happened to his twenty when that ticket seller changed it into a one dollar bill."

The June 10 *Billboard* reported: "Christy Bros. Circus overcomes Sunday ordinance in Torrington, Wyoming.

"When Christy Bros. Circus arrived in Torrington, Wyoming on May 21, to show there the city authorities notified the management that a city ordinance forbade any paid admission amusements of any kind to be held there on the Sabbath. The show management tried to persuade the Torrington authorities to let the show go ahead inasmuch as it had been widely advertised for that date but they refused to give their consent to a violation of the city ordinance.

"However, there was a way out. The show management announced to the crowd that there would be no admission charge to the show, but everyone would be expected to contribute 60 cents as a free-will offering as they passed through the gate. In this way

The four pole Christy big top in 1923. Pfening Archives.



the circus management escaped violating the letter of the law, if not the spirit, and the Torrington authorities conceded that they had been outwitted."

On October 21 Christy Wrote W. P. Hall: "Well we are going to winter in Beaumont after all. I could not get enough buildings at Bellville, Illinois and the buildings in St. Louis were in too bad shape to keep animals in.

"Our business was very good until this week. It is off now as the blacks don't have any money. However, this is our first bad week this fall.

"Have you heard anything yet as to when you will have baby elephants. Gollmars are near us today, only 28 miles away. We showed Benton the other day and had a world of visitors from Hot Springs.

"I am going to build twelve new cages this winter, have loaded up several wagon loads of good oak lumber lately, I can get it around here at \$12 a thousand and it costs \$150 at Beaumont."

The November 18 *Billboard* reported that Christy bought the Luella Forepaugh Fish Wild West show steam caliope and a carload of wagons which were stored at the Grubbs Amusement Devices factory in Kansas City. The equipment was owned by James M. Patterson and many of the wagons were from the Gentry Bros. Circus which Patterson had purchased earlier in the year.

Christy recalled the acquisition: "We moved the wagons to our quaters in Beaumont and worked them over in our wagon shop. We had seven blacksmiths and several wagon builders as well as painters. We added a children's

One of the Gentry pony cages in a 1922 Christy parade. Pfening Archives.



section to our already long parade. This was a great attraction and caused much comment as each cage was drawn by teams of Shetland ponies. There were also two small ticket wagons, also miniature. We used one to load parade trapings. The other was used as an up town reserve seat wagon. It was presided over by Bill Moore, a long time figure with Christy Bros. Sometime after we closed the big railroad circus I sold one of those small ticket wagons to my good friend Frank Walters in Houston. Walters finally gave the wagon to Harry Hertzberg of San Antonio. Hertzberg left his collection to the San Antonio Public Library." The wagon remains in the Hertzberg collection to this day.

1923

The Christy circus traveled on fifteen cars in 1923, one advance, six flats, three stocks, one tunnel car and four sleepers. The big top was a 130 foot round with three 40s and one 50. The menagerie was a 70 with four 30 foot middles. The enlarged show was titled

Christy Bros. Greater United 4 Ring Wild Animal Exposition. Among new parade wagons was the Sea Shell tableau wagon that had been on the J. H. Eschman Circus.

Christy bought two elephants, Bughouse Alice and Nero, from the American Circus Corporation over the winter of 1922-1923.

He later wrote: "I bought the elephant Big Alice from Mugivan and Bowers and sent a man to Montgomery, Alabama to pick her up. The Howes Great London circus [known as Gollmar Bros. in 1922] was wintering there. However, I did not know that Alice was an outlaw, who had run away numerous times, as well as knocking a hole in the winter quarters barn. She would not carry a blanket and was deathly afraid of dogs, pigs, even camels. She was a liability in parade, But

This former J. H. Eschman tableau was bought for the 1923 season. Pfening Archives.

the price was cheap and I needed elephants.

"By the time she arrived I had already learned of her many faults. In those days nothing deterred me. So I ordered my colored elephant man, Sidney Rink, to chain Alice's four legs to the railroad track at the Beaumont, Texas, quarters. We made a huge blanket from burlap bags. With a man on each corner, the lessons in carrying a blanket started for Alice. Rink laid her down and the four men came up behind and slapped the blanket on Alice's back. Then the howling and shaking started, while the trainer pounded her ear with his club. This took place three or four times a day for several months. Finally she enjoyed the blanket. In the meantime I built a separate stall for Alice and chained her front feet to a four inch thick oak platform. She would pull any stakes we could drive. But now we had her standing on her own holding device.

"Directly across from her stall we built one for a camel, just out of reach. So day and night she saw a camel. Now we still had to familiarize her with dogs. We had five dog acts. So I built the dog pens so that each time a trainer took a dog act out to the training rings they had to pass Alice. This soon fixed the trouble. We also rigged a platform over her back that we loaded with a long string of tin cans tied together with wires. At intervals we dumped the cans on her back until the noise did not bother her. By spring she was cured."

The February 3 *Billboard* reported: "Great activity at Christy Bros. Quarters. Fourteen wagons and steel arena being built, 15 car show will be finely equipped.

"Beaumont, Texas, January 25. El-

ephants, horses, animals, cars and equipment of every description are coming daily into winter quarters of the Christy show. A force of fifty men is busily engaged under the direction of superintendent Harry Sells. The show's own complete mill is turning out material for fourteen new wagons. The machine shop is humming along on a new steel arena and everywhere there are mechanics, carpenters, painters and repair men working on the old and new equipment.

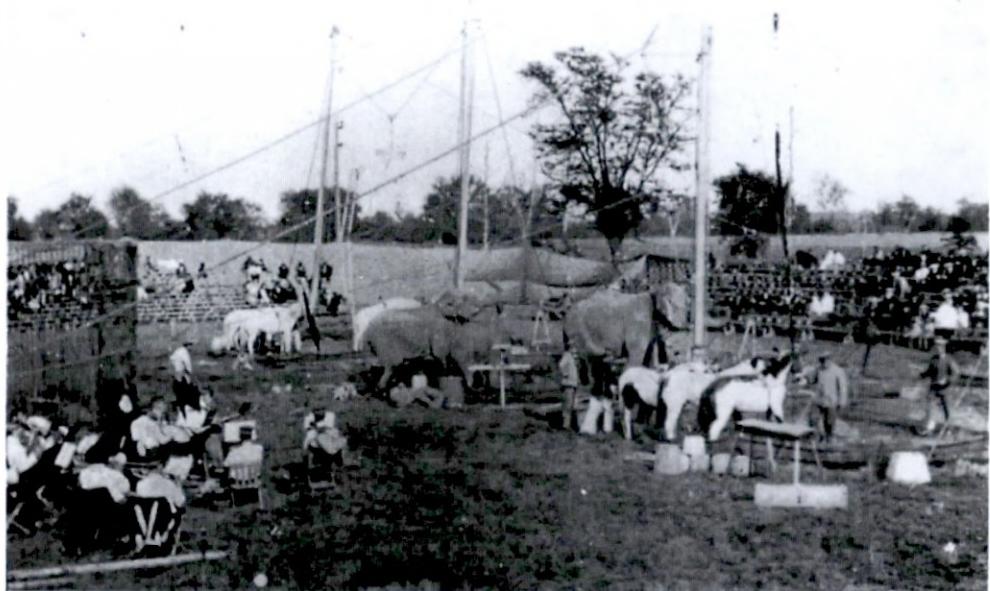
"A new working men's sleeper is being built and the entire train is getting a thorough overhauling under direction of train master Benny Sturgis. The boss painter, Charles Parker, has a crew of men laying on the gold, red and yellow. Eight of the parade wagons have already gone through the paint shop and there are sixteen more to go through before the baggage wagons. Seven animal trainers are working in five rings and one arena every day putting through horses, lions, bears, pumas, leopards, dogs, monkeys, ponies and a new herd of elephants.

"The new big top is here and every stake, rope and pole is brand new. The tent is a 130 foot round top with three 49 foot middles. A new menagerie top is now in the making at Driver Bros. in Chicago. This will also be equipped with all new poles, etc. Superintendent Sells is now building a new stake driver that drives two stakes at one time and is operated with an electric type eight-horse engine. The seats are all equipped with the patent chains, thereby doing away with the old-style toe pins.

"Another carload of heavy draft stock is expected soon and all new harness is ordered. It is the management's intention to have the largest and best fifteen-car show that was ever framed. All people engaged by the management are selected for faithfulness, honesty and ability.

"The cookhouse is framed for convenience, quick action and sanitation. All cooking is done in a great range wagon, which also contains the big ice boxes, hot water tanks, work tables, coffee urn, etc. Like the stake-driving machine, the cookhouse is framed this season for speed.

"The parade is not being neglected. While all the hustle is going on over at the quarters, the wardrobe room is also a busy place. There will be a sixteen-foot tableau wagon load of new wardrobe for the girls, men, pony boys, drivers, animal men, horses, camels and elephants. Five bands, an eighteen foot thirty-two-whistle steam cal-



lope, an air calliope, twenty-four wagons, seventeen mounted people, three camels and a herd of elephants should make a parade that the folks will talk about. There will be seventeen cages of animals in the parade."

Christy later wrote: "In 1923 we trained a novelty act, a snow white horse with a lady vocalist riding. The horse was covered with a beautiful lace cover with gaudy tinsel tassels. She rode into the center ring singing a bird or dove song. While she was singing we released white doves, that fly to her and light on the net atop the horse until the horse is literally covered with the doves. A beautiful picture. We worked all winter training some 30 or 40 birds for the act. This was done by tying strings to their legs and feeding them one by one. The feed was on the net covering the horse, allowing them something to cling to. They got into the habit one at a time to fly to the horse for their food. Then we started eliminating the string from two or three and keep it on the others. Finally we could trust all of them to fly to the horse for dinner, then back to their crate home, where most of their food was placed. We were ready to display the act.

"Opening day in Beaumont was a very hot day. The big top was packed. We had to lower the side walls all around the tent to give some comfort to the audience. That was fine until the beautiful dove number. We turned them loose one by one and they flew to the horse. The act got a big hand. That was something we did not contemplate to have any effect on the birds. But it did. They all panicked and instead of flying back to their home in that cage every single one flew in a group right out through that opening in the canvas. I never saw them again. Another whole winter's training

During the 1923 season the show was side walled following a blow down. It is interesting to note that the steel arena was placed in back of the three rings, with the band seated next to it. Joe Bradbury collection.

lost. But we did train another group the next winter and used them for a number of years. We did it with music from a record player to make sure nothing would distract them. I always used a radio or a record player in the training barns to get all the animals used to music."

After opening on March 15 in Beaumont the show went into Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Kentucky, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama for the first time.

The 1923 season got off to a very bad start. Christy remembered: "It rained for 59 days and 59 nights, made me think of Noah and his ark. We went from Houston to Canada before the rains cleared away and Winnipeg, Manitoba was the first winning day. Up to then we had lost \$52,000. The circus business is just like a big crap game. Now you win, now you lose. Droughts, strikes, too much rain, small pox, quarantines, can't dig the potatoes, apple crop is bad, mills are closed in Massachusetts, shoe factory went bankrupt, the mines are closed, floods, these are some of the hazards that can cost a circus much loss. To say nothing of opposition circuses surrounding you, fighting for every town trying to beat you in. Or posting opposition bills saying they were the only circus coming, or what have you. You better be in the tobacco country after their harvest. The point is to know where to show when, and do it."



Side show band on a cage in a 1922 parade. Circus World Museum collection.

Christy recalled the year: "On May 25, 1923 we were playing in the mining town of Herrin, Illinois. One of our elephant men, Sidney Rink, a colored man, had trouble with a miner and hit him with an elephant hook. This caused much resentment because of a black man hitting a white man. A near riot started. Citizens wanted that Negro. They searched the cars and started shooting at us as we were tearing down the tents and loading. Meanwhile the elephant man was with us on the lot. When the shooting started we ducked behind wagons and no one was hit. We turned off all the lights so they could not see us. Then I rolled the elephant man in a bunch of canvas and into the canvas wagon with just enough room breathe. We had many other black men on the lot. By then the citizens were hungry for any black man. After darkening the lot I sent all the blacks across a field, advising them to stand along the tracks several miles away by a coal mine. We stopped the train there as we were leaving and picked them up, but nary a colored person came on board. We never knew where they all disappeared to. See how easy it was for us to get into a lot of trouble over a small incident."

The *Billboard* seldom commented on the under side of the circus business. However the June 23 issue reported: "Circus folks will read the following two excerpts from the *Evening Call* of Duquoin, Illinois with mingled feelings of rage and shame.

"Thomas J. Johnson has received many complaints against this outfit and intends to get after them. Protests have also been received by the Governor of Illinois and the Civic League.

"It is perfectly plain that the *Billboard* will have to break out again. We have been hoping fervently that this would not be necessary. It hurts the

clean shows. But what else is there to do in the face of the following exhibits.

"Read them: The Duquoin *Evening Call*, May 18, 1923.

"Grafters with Christy shows work boldly. Concession men pull raw stuff and pickpockets operate.

"One man lost \$30 when he had his pockets picked by a professional in the side show of Christy Bros. Circus here yesterday afternoon. Elmer Browning, an insurance agent, reported the loss of that sum to the police.

"Concession men with the show worked their petty grafts boldly at last night's performance, and the management of the show also got into the game of plundering the public when they raised the price of reserved seats at the night performance fifty cents instead of the regular twenty-five cents charged at the afternoon show. With the admission price fixed at seventy-five cents this made attendance at the performance cost as much as for Ringling Bros. The show, while about as good as any circus we can expect to visit Duquoin nowadays, was worth about fifty cents.

"Such tactics upon the part of a circus management these days spells disaster, for word of grafting and gouging soon gets ahead of the circus and ruins its business. There is no occasion for such practices as were in evidence last night. The show is doomed to early closing with a continuation of them."

"The Herrin, Illinois *Evening Call* of May 26, 1923 said: 'Christy Bros. Circus should be run out of Egypt and out of Illinois. Reports from every town in which this circus has appeared are of the same nature as those produced when the circus exhibited in Duquoin. Daily newspapers all over the state should take up this matter in advance of the show's coming and by publicity force the circus management to adopt decent business methods or go out of business.'

"At West Frankfort the same high-handed grafting on reserved seats tickets, the intimidation of young people

into purchasing things hawked by concession men and actual robbery by the picking of pockets are made public. Young boys were induced to work about the show for free tickets, which were refused them, and in addition their head wear was held to keep the boys on the grounds. When one father, looking for his boy, found out the facts in the case the hats and caps of all the boys were restored except to his own boy, and when he insisted on payment for the lost cap he was badly beaten up.

"Warrants for the assailants could not be served because the men disappeared. This warrant ought to be served and the roughnecks given stiff fines and jail sentences.

"Newspapers who fail to give this sort of thing the publicity it deserves, and to spread it broadcast, are failing in their duty to the public. Pass it along."

The attack on Christy was part of a larger campaign by the *Billboard*, at the behest of the Ringling Circus, particularly Charles Ringling, to eradicate graft from circuses. The Ringling show's concern with this issue was, at its core, a means to assault its great rival, Mugivan and Bowers' American Circus Corporation whose troupes carried graft.

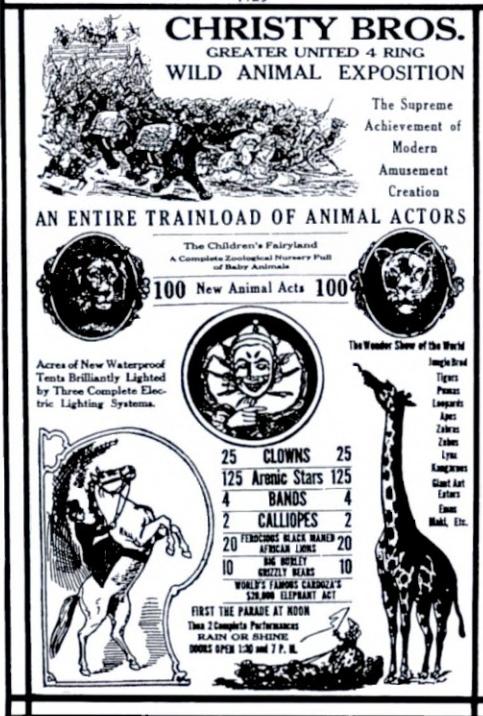
The joints in the side show must not have been working, as they would surely have been mentioned. All of this was of little concern to Christy. After all, he was getting his cut from all the grafting on the show.

The June 30 *Billboard* told of woes on the show: "The following, concerning Christy Bros. Circus appeared in the Delphos (Ohio) *Press*: The Christy circus came to Delphos with a story of hard luck and left without having improved in the matter. According to one of the management the company lost \$52,000 on its way north from Texas, having struck a succession of rainy days. It was stated that for about a week before coming here business had been better and the show had been making some money.

"At Plymouth (Indiana), however, where the company showed before coming to Delphos, a loss of \$2,000 was sustained. In this city a combination of hard luck threw the outfit for another loss. The show arrived too late for an afternoon performance and a threatened thunder storm cut the attendance in the evening so a further loss of \$1600 was experienced.

"The circus is now on its way to the industrial section of Eastern Ohio and Pennsylvania with the hope of retrieving its fortunes. The company left

SIKESTON - SATURDAY - MAY 12



Christy Bros. 1923 newspaper ad. Ted Bowman collection.

Delphos for Mansfield where a new big top was to be substituted for the dilapidated tent which was in use here. A number of good animal and circus acts were featured in the performance.

"The owner of the Curtis Show Print, of Continental, Ohio, writing of the show said: 'I saw the outfit and it was certainly as bad looking as any I ever gazed at."

Christy wrote: "On September 5, 1923 we played Lincolnton, North Carolina. It was a beautiful day, we had fair business in the afternoon. The night crowd was also fair. But a shortage of money left the lot outside crowded with Negroes who were longing to see all they could without having to buy a ticket. The black population in the south never were good circus customers, but they sure did play the side shows and concession stands outside on the midway.

"That night I was standing in the marquee which was rigged with chain aisles so that the patrons would have to come in single file, allowing us to collect the tickets in some sense of order. I was facing towards the midway. A deputy sheriff with a pistol at his belt was facing me. All of a sudden the deputy jumped over those chains nearly tearing them down and ran for cov-

er. He saw what I could not see behind me; a big lion came loping past me by less than two feet. It ran through the crowded midway where there were about a thousand Negroes. Panic struck like lightning. The black folks ran, fell, jumped in every direction. Many mounted on parked cars, some up trees and telephone poles. Some never stopped running. That lion was as scared as the people from all that shouting. He ran right across the lot, which was surrounded by a Bodock or Hedge Apple tree fence, which was covered with long stickers. As the lion was passing along that fence at the edge of the lot there stood two white men, very intoxicated. I was following the lion to keep him in sight as it was night. As I passed the two inebriated gentlemen one said, 'it's a lion.' The other fellow said, 'Hell no, it's a dog.' I kept chasing that lion up a street several blocks. Mr. lion mounted a front porch of a house. There was a screen door closed, but the other door was open. The lion evidently could not see the screen because he walked right through it into the house. By then one of the colored animal men named Inez came up. I yelled for him to close the door, figuring we had at last trapped the lion in the house. No one had appeared yet so my first thought was that there was no one home. Inez instead of closing the lion in followed the lion through the house. This scared him more and the lion jumped out through a back window, landing in the back yard. I heard him and saw those big shinning eyes in the dark. He ran into an old garage in the back yard. Now I felt sure I had him. I rushed over with the least noise to close the garage door. But luck was not with me. Those doors were the sliding type and had not been closed in years. I scared the lion out again. This time he

was looking for a place to hide. He ran into a chicken house. The chickens inside immediately raised plenty of fuss. I was sure I had him. But there was no door on the chicken house.

"The house was being painted and there was a pile of shutters stacked near by. Inez and I quickly grabbed a couple of shutters and slammed them over the opening where a door should have been. We had the lion penned in. By this time twenty or thirty citizens had followed us and were standing a good distance away in the alley. They had guns and clubs. About that time more of our animal men came up bringing catching equipment, rolls of canvas, ropes and reserve seat netting. They had brought a special animal catching wagon we had built for such an emergency. The wagon usually carried ostriches, which were placed in the menagerie so it was always ready. We backed the cage against the chicken house. All during this story I have referred to the lion as him, actually it was a large female, named Gertrude. I was standing there talking baby talk and calling Gertie, trying to calm her. We shined flashlights in the cage. Gertrude was anxious to get away from those chickens and she jumped into the cage. Although it is unbelievable, a man lived in the house the lion ran through. While all of this commotion was going on he stuck his head out of a second story window yelling 'what's going on down there.' I thought that it looked like a good press story, I paid him \$15 for a new screen door."

The show returned to Texas at Tenak on November 9, then played five stands in Louisiana before closing on December 17 in DeQuincy. Including the run to quarters in Beaumont the total milage for the season was 14,620.

A packed Christy Bros. midway in 1923. Circus World Museum collection.



BILL KASISKA'S LETTERHEADS



Gordon W. Lillie's Pawnee Bill Wild West show was second only to that of William F. Cody's. This letterhead was used in 1893. It is printed in black.

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This paper was presented at the 1995 CHS convention in San Antonio, Texas.

In 1900 Alf T. Ringling published a book entitled *Life Story of the Ringling Brothers*. One of the incidents he related in this volume concerned the first time the brothers "talked youthful ambition among themselves." This he marks as the genesis of their deciding to have a circus. The stimulus for this was the arrival of a show in McGregor, Iowa, where the family then lived. Apparently, Alf T. had forgotten the title of the circus, or he felt it was of no importance for he didn't name it in the book. "Not a great tented circus," he wrote, "for this was in the 60's." It was on a steamboat which announced its approach by "glaring rosin torches and a river calliope."

Unfortunately for the brothers there was no money available to them for tickets, but as luck would have it, one of the performers visited their father's harness shop. He needed some repair to be done to the leather belt and pouch he used as the understander in the perch act. This performer was known to the Ringlings for he was a resident of McGregor, "popular with his townsfolk and a demigod in the eyes of the village boys," as Alf T. described him. Again, he didn't bother to name the man. Father Ringling repaired the equipment and because the performer was a local, refused payment for the work. The circus man thereupon presented a family ticket to the harness-maker.

"It was an old-fashioned one ring show . . . to the Ringling youngsters it stood out then and stands out today as the greatest show, the brightest and most delightful that ever was given."

To a researcher, the immediate questions that arise on reading this are: What was the date of the stand? Which circus was it? Who was the perch performer? An investigation into the answers produced an astonishing list of commentators on the event. It also provided a disheartening look at the way the use of secondary sources and incompetent research can twist the truth and deflect the path of historical accuracy.

THE DATE

To determine the year in which the Ringling boys saw the circus we have to first decide when they lived in McGregor. All that Alf T. said is that it was in "the 60's." J. J. Schlicher did the major work on the family, which he published in the *Wisconsin Mag-*

THE CIRCUS THAT INSPIRED THE RINGLINGS

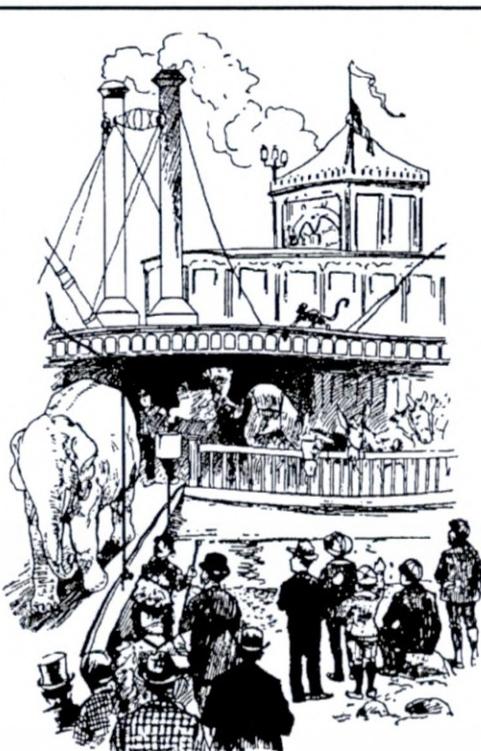
By Stuart Thayer

azine of History

in 1942. He determined that the first documentation of the family in McGregor was an advertisement for the father's harness shop in the *North Iowa Times* on December 10, 1862. The last advertisement for the shop was on April 5, 1871. A complete list of businesses in McGregor was printed by the *Times* on January 3, 1872, and Ringling's name was not included. Therefore, the family was in McGregor between December 1862 and April 1871.

The five oldest brothers who were present when the steamboat brought the circus. He said John Ringling was four years old at the time. John was

Fanciful drawing from *Life Story of the Ringling Bros.* showing the circus steam boat, that set the course for the young brothers life's work, unloading at McGregor, Iowa. Pfening Archives.



They watched the one big elephant of the show majestically tread down the gang-plank to the shore.

born in May 1866, so by this reckoning the boat must have touched the wharf in 1870, though possibly very early in 1871. Yet the book reads "the 60's." Obviously, there is confusion here. We have to ascribe it to poor memory, lacking any other explanation. Alf was writing thirty years after the event. The things that stood out for him were the things he mentioned: a circus

on a steamboat with a calliope carrying a one-ring tented circus with a perch performer who lived in McGregor.

Earl Chapin May in a newspaper article in 1931 stated that the incident occurred in the summer of 1870. He had done his arithmetic just as we did. He had finished his book *The Circus from Rome to Ringling* by that time (it was published in 1932) and in it referred to conversations he had with the brothers. It's entirely possible that one of them told him that the year was 1870. However, sometime between his 1931 article in the *Baltimore Sun* (August 16) and *The Circus from Rome to Ringling* he decided it was not "a minor tented show" but Dan Rice's Paris Pavilion Circus. May's *From Rome to Ringling* became, and unfortunately still is, the standard circus history simply because it is available in most libraries. Not a historian, and barely a researcher, May published as great a compendium of error as any commentator ever has. Because of this the 1870 date occurs over and over in the retelling of the tale. Since May was the first, and best-known, scribe to use the 1870 date it is our assumption that later commentators took it from his book. Among these persons we would list Edwin C. Hill (1932), Dexter Fellows (1936), Henry Ringling North (1960), Ruth Beitz (1961), and Sverre Braathen (1970). None of these people were historians, either, and none of them, obviously, went to the trouble of doing their own research. North has a disclaimer in his *The Circus Kings* in which he writes, "Like most legends, this one is probably contrary to fact but contains the essence of truth." Since he says that his uncles told him it was Dan Rice's circus, it could well be that they had come to believe it themselves.

Two books, Alvin F. Harlow's *The Ringlings, Wizards of the Circus* (1951), and John and Alice Durant's *Pictorial History of the American Circus* (1957) used the date 1869, perhaps because Alf T. said "in the 60's." As it turns out, 1869 is the correct year, as we will illustrate by iden-

tifying the circus and the performer.

THE CIRCUS

As to what show it was, Alf T.'s "not a great tented circus," is of no help as few great tented circuses plied the Mississippi. The limitations forced on showmen when they travelled the river made it difficult to carry parade wagons, for instance. Some carried just a bandwagon, others a mounted band. When larger shows made river runs they sometimes towed barges for extra material; we haven't found this method used before the Civil War. The earliest example of good-sized menageries, including elephants, being transported on steamboats are G. F. Bailey & Co. and the Mabie Menagerie, both in 1863.

In his 1931 article May refers to the exhibition the boys saw as "a minor tented show." Edwin C. Hill called it "a little one-horse circus" in 1932. Then, in his 1932 book May suddenly proclaims that it was Dan Rice, "making upper Mississippi towns with a cumbersome, though colorful, floating circus sold to him by the Flaf-foots who had brought it back from a season in Paris." Later in the same tome he says "Dan Rice's long-awaited Great Paris Pavilion Circus warped up to the dock and unloaded." The source of this bolt from the blue can not, unfortunately, be checked, as May used no footnotes, another sign of his unprofessional approach. The effect of this identification has been felt ever since, either being accepted or at least acknowledged. Karl K. Knecht in *White Tops* in 1933 used the phrase "Dan Rice some say." Others, such as C. P. Fox and Dean Jensen indicated they, too, were not convinced it was Rice. However, most commentators picked up Mays' identification without hesitancy. Among those we listed above all seem to have taken at face value May's decision that it was Dan Rice that visited McGregor in 1870 and inspired, in part, the Ringling brothers decision to become circus men.

Unfortunately for all of them, May included, Dan Rice did not play McGregor in 1870. He played Hickman and Columbus, Kentucky on April 25 and 26 and turned east into the Ohio River, playing Mound City, Illinois on April 28. He remained east of the Mississippi for the balance of the season. May's naming and describing Dan Rice's Paris Pavilion Circus was aped by an anonymous writer in the *American Weekly* of November 27, 1936, by Alvin F. Harlow, and the Durants. Not one of these writers checked the most



Alf T. Ringling, author of *Life Story of the Ringling Bros.* and originator of the account of the brothers being inspired by the circus in McGregor. Pfening Archives.

obvious source, the local newspaper. McGregor's *North Iowa Times* carried the announcement of but one circus in 1870, that of George W. DeHaven.

Further, Dan Rice's Paris Pavilion Circus was a wagon show that toured first in 1871 and even then did not play McGregor. The Paris Pavilion was a canvas-topped, wood-walled, pre-fabricated structure that had been built in Albany in 1867 for use at the Paris Exposition of 1868. Rice's men apparently struggled with the thing all season. It was 118 feet in diameter and had 20 foot high sidewalls. They finally stored it in Baltimore. It was auctioned there in August 1874, and brought \$2,500.

"Not a great tented circus," in Alf T.'s book could have referred to DeHaven's Sensation Circus of 1870. Travelling aboard the steamboat *Victor* the show had fifteen performers. Featured were Spencer Stokes and his talented daughters. Most of the acts were second-rate. The perche act was done by the Davenport brothers who, contrary to Alf T.'s description, did not live in McGregor. Since we stated above that 1869 was the correct year we can eliminate DeHaven as a possibility and turn to the "demi-god" performer.

THE PERFORMER

We have located fourteen commentaries on the subject. They date from 1931 to 1993. The earliest one to

identify Andrew Gaffney as the performer who needed the leather repair is Alvin Harlow in his 1951 book. Since Alf T. didn't identify Gaffney, then neither did Earl Chapin May. From this we can assume that everyone who wrote before 1951 was following May, or didn't think the performer's name was important.

Andrew Gaffney was born in Canada, according to the Iowa census of 1860. His obituary in the 27 August 1892 *New York Clipper* says he died at seventy, which would indicate a birth date in 1822. Family tradition has him born in 1834. He was quoted once as saying he joined the Van Amburgh show (Raymond & Co. and Van Amburgh & Co. Menageries United) in 1852. If this was his first employment we would favor the 1834 birth date, as few performers waited until they were thirty to begin their circus careers. He was a cannonball performer, that is he juggled twenty-five to fifty pound cannonballs, threw them in the air, and caught them on his neck and shoulders. He also was the understander in a perch-pole act, a common duty for a circus strongman. A large man, Gaffney was sometimes called "The Irish Giant," or so says his obituary. It also says he began his career with the Orton Circus in 1856. The first notice we have found of him is in 1866. This might indicate a mis-print in the *Clipper*, yet the paper said he was in the business forty years, which goes back to the 1852 Van Amburgh menagerie. By 1860 Gaffney was living in McGregor and tending bar in the off-season. The 1870 census shows the same. He was with the Orton show through 1868, and was featured in their advertising. In our subject year, 1869, he switched to John Stowe's Circus. This outfit became Stowe & Orton in October and proceeded on a southern tour that, once begun, went into early 1871. Gaffney was with the company for the entire run.

Alf T. says Gaffney was a "demi-god" to the Ringling boys. May uses the very same term, which tells us he had read Ringling's book. But since Ringling didn't name the show, journalist May felt compelled to flesh out the description. Unfortunately, he chose the wrong circus to be the one that inspired our little heroes.

The *North Iowa Times* carried two circus ads in 1869. One of them was for "Dan Rice's Own Circus," which arrived on the steamer *Will S. Hayes* on June 21. The other was for "John Stowe & Co.'s Great Western Circus" which arrived overland on September

7. Among the performers with John Stowe we find "Mr. Andrew Gaffney, rolling globe and flying tranca performer." No mention made of a perch pole performance. In addition, another performer is listed as doing the cannonball act as well as being "light and heavy balancer" (read: juggler). A rolling globe act in those days, and these, is one which the performer stands on a large ball and propels it about the ring with his feet. A tranca act is one in which he lies in a cradle and juggles a wooden beam--the "tranca"--a ball, a barrel or anything else, with his feet. If, as Alf T. states, Gaffney needed a repair to his perch harness then he must have been doing that act in the Stowe program. The discovery of these ads, which any of the purveyors of the 1870 Dan Rice identification could have made, merely points out the limits of their research. Most of them obviously read May and accepted his version. How he was able to drag in the Paris Pavilion Circus, we may never know. There is nothing in his notes at the Circus World Museum, the depository of his personal papers, to enlighten us. Yet, identifying John Stowe's Circus as the organization which carried Andrew Gaffney to his hometown, and the one ring circus as the one the Ringling family visited on a family pass still doesn't answer some questions raised by Alf T.'s 1900 book.

He said it was a boat show, and that it had a calliope. As far as is known, Stowe did not travel by steamer. Dan Rice did, but there is no record of there being a calliope on the *Will S. Hays*. Did Al Ringling confuse two, or maybe three shows from his boyhood memories? In looking for a calliope on a steamboat stopping in McGregor in these years, we find several steamboat shows, but none with a calliope. Of course, it is entirely possible that the memory of a steamboat carrying a circus could automatically trigger the idea of a steam piano being present, factual or not.

Forgiving Alf Ringling's thirty-year error is easy; and it leaves us with Andrew Gaffney and John Stowe's circus and 1869 as the year that was recalled in the book. There it might rest, but, unfortunately for the concept of a neat package of research, another Ringling spoke out.

In an interview published in the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* on March 26, 1921 Charles Ringling was reported as saying: "When I was a boy out in McGregor, Iowa, where I was born, Dan Rice's circus came up the Mississippi River. It was my first cir-



Charles Ringling, who confused the Dan Rice and John Stowe circuses in a 1921 interview. Pfening Archives.

cus with its red bandwagon and spotted horses. Of course I was taken, and allowed to remain for the concert at which a young man and his sister sang *Little Brown Jug*, and *Shouldn't Wonder, No, By Thunder*. "That lad--well, bless me, here he is now."

The reporter then said that a tall, spare, gray haired man with twinkling eyes stepped forward and was introduced. It was Albert Miaco, dean of circus clowns. Fortunately, there are some clues in Charles Ringling's statement. The spotted horses he mentions were a feature with John Stowe & Co. beginning in the season of 1868, thus placing the hitch in McGregor in 1869. Spotted, or piebald, or pinto, horses were still quite rare in the eastern United States at the time, descended as they were from the Indian mounts of the west, where they had been introduced by the Spanish explorers. Their rarity is seemingly documented by the fact that when circuses had them they advertised them. Dan Rice's circus of 1869 not only had no spotted horses, it had no bandwagon. Edgar Menter's band rode horseback through the streets of the towns in which the show appeared.

The song, *Little Brown Jug*, which incidentally was thought to be inappropriate for tender ears since it was a drinking song, was not published until 1869. This does not mean that Al Miaco could not have sung it in that year, but it is cutting things close. Further, Al Mi-

aco was not with either Dan Rice or the Stowe concern in 1869. His name graced the roster of Ames' Menagerie, and in 1870 that of H. M. Smith's show. So much for Charlie's contribution.

To sum up, John's age being listed as four (he was born in May, 1866), makes it seem that the circus visited in 1870. DeHaven's did. Both Alf T. And Charles Ringling say it was a boat show. DeHaven's was. But the story of Gaffney presenting August Ringling with a family ticket clearly eliminates the DeHaven circus. That story can only point to Stowe's aggregation. Charles' description of the spotted horses points to Stowe. Yet both brothers said it was Dan Rice, and we know that Rice played McGregor in 1869. We also know he didn't play there in 1870. Our conclusion can only be that the brothers combined their memory of Rice's appearance with that of Stowe, and Alf T., thirty years later, and Charles, fifty years later, can surely be forgiven for this lapse of memory.

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We are indebted to Patricia Wolfe, San Jose, California for the genealogical information on Andrew Gaffney. Mrs. Wolfe's husband is Gaffney's great grandson.

**One Day Dish Washer,
Next Day Staff Waiter.**

I joined the Barnum & Bailey circus early in the 1917 season as a dishwasher in the cook house. Johnnie Burns, the assistant steward to Charles Henry, placed me on the short side or performers dining tent. Dad Moore was head dishwasher and was glad to get any help that came along. There were eight to twelve dish washers on the performers' side, and at least twelve to twenty on the workingmen's side. The portable, automatic steam dishwasher was still seventeen years away.

There were curtains stretched across each end of the dining tent with an entrance cut in the center to allow the waiters to come and go. Two long tables were butted together, set on waist high wooden jacks, with removable side boards on the sides of the tables to keep the dishes from sliding off the tables.

When we had a full crew two men would clean the scraps off the dishes while two others washed the dishes and silverware. Each man had large galvanized tubs which were on a table much lower than the dish table so that he would not have to bend or stretch while washing. Most of the time they would shake the tub from side to side, and then throw the dishes up on the tables. Two men then would rinse and stack the different dishes into piles after which two others would give the dishes a lick and a promise of drying. One man would carry the dishes back to the kitchen. If the meal was supper he would pack the dishes into the dish boxes.

One man handled the silverware. As the dishwasher washed the silver he would put it into a gunny sack or a potato bag and then shake the silver and dump it on another gunny sack and try to rub the silver dry. When the silver was unloaded the next morning at least half would be rusty. If we had the personnel one man would carry hot water and help carry the dishes to the kitchen. We seldom had any extra help; so at times we would try to make only one or two changes of hot water last the entire meal or at least two to three hours.

All dishes except the cups and plates were white enamelware, including meat platters, soup bowls, individual deep vegetable dishes, desserts, bread, cake and

THE CIRCUS STEWARD

Part VIII

By John M. Staley

roll platters, saucers, syrup and tea pots. They were nice and clean looking when they were new, but it did not take long to get chipped. The way they were thrown around many a man got blood poisoning in his hand by getting a piece of enamel under his finger nail. Each year the steward would replace nearly all of the enamelware.

At the time of this anecdote Charles Henry was cook house steward. Johnnie Burns was headwaiter on the performers side. Billy Gillette was headwaiter on the workingmen and bosses side. James Kerr, better known as "Jim the fixer," was chef. Daniel Hislop, "Dan the butcher," was in charge of the butcher shop. In those days the steward would purchase whole sides of beef. The circus butchers would cut the side into different portions. Roy Schalesman, "Pottsville Shorty," was staff waiter in the "Kings Top," the name we gave John and Mabel Ringling's dining tent, which was in the rear of the steward's tent.

World War I was picking up in tempo. The draft was pulling men from the circus into the service every day. Besides that, the draft dodgers were being picked up in almost every town where we exhibited. The street parade was being canceled almost every day, although the management would send out a token part of the parade.

One day in July Johnnie Burns was called into the service. Charles Henry gave Burns' job to "Pottsville Shorty," a staff waiter. The next day after breakfast Schalesman called me from the dish table. Out of a clear sky he said, "Johnnie you are now the new staff waiter." I

The dish washers of the Barnum & Bailey cookhouse. Pfening Archives.



was thunder struck, I could not believe that he would pick a dishwasher when there were many an old-time waiter in the dining tent who was entitled to the position. He started to show me the duties of a staff waiter. By noon I was doing darn good, at least I thought so. The big test would be supper when the entire staff would give me the once over. Don't think I was not scared, because I was.

The staff table had its own cook in the kitchen with his own wood stove. All meals on the staff table were à la carte. They could choose from a printed menu that was placed on all the performers' tables. At any meal they could order the following: steaks, pork chops, lamb chops, prime roast of beef (available every day at supper), hot cakes, french toast or waffles at any time, eggs, bacon, sausage and ham. The staff sure ate off the side of the hog.

All dishes were white enamelware. There were no trays used in the cook house. The waiter would use either long or short arm service. The steam table was between the performers and workingmen sides of the cookhouse. There was a high curtain strung from one side of the dining tent to the other, with an opening for the steam table. My steam table for the staff was in the kitchen. The staff cook had two black roasting pans on top of the stove. The pans were half full of hot water, this provided a place for vegetables or what ever he wanted to keep hot.

As I picked up my orders in the kitchen and racked the dishes on my arm. I had to be careful that there would not be a miscue, or I would have have hash. The only dish I could never juggle were the soup bowls. They were always slopping around. I was going along fine that first day as staff waiter until the latter part of the supper meal. The circus performance was out and over. The dining tent was having a rush of late performers. My table

was starting to fill up. I found out later Charles Henry would always come into the dining tent each day about half way through supper. He would chat with folks at the different tables and end up at the staff table about the time the circus let out. The longer he stood at the staff table the more nervous I was got, wishing he would get

lost or someone would call him into the kitchen.

Fred and Ella Bradna were sitting across from each other on the far end of the staff table. They both ordered the same meal, soup, prime rib, rare and medium rare, green tossed salad, stewed tomatoes and mashed potatoes. While bringing in the meal for some of the other men I also brought in their soup. I was serving Mrs. Bradna first, as I had been told. All of a sudden the side dish of stewed tomatoes slipped off my arm, I must have turned sharply or moved my arm too fast as it landed in Mrs. Bradna's lap. Charlie Henry must of heard her scream, as he came hotfooting to the table and started to sputter and throw his arms up into the air, all the time bawling me out in no uncertain circus language. During all of this I was trying to sop up the tomatoes. Mrs. Bradna was trying to quiet Henry, telling him it was an accident, which anyone could make. She told him I was a new boy and everything was strange to me and perhaps I was frightened more of him than spilling the dish of tomatoes.

With all the talking going on in the dining tent it did not take long after my accident to hear a pin drop into the grass, as it seemed a deep vacuum erupted near my table. That was my first and last embarrassment on the Barnum & Bailey show in 1917.

The staff table was all men except for two women, Mrs. Bradna and Mrs. Clyde Ingalls. All the men were executives of the circus. Sam Beckett was manager; Charlie Hutchinson was treasurer; Fred Dewolfe was auditor; Carl Hathaway was ticket seller in the red wagon; Fred Bradna was equestrian director; Charles Kanelly was private secretary for John Ringling; Joe Boyton was ticket seller in the yellow wagon, "Chick" Bell was superintendent of the ticket sellers; "Cap" Carroll was in the red wagon and played the steam calliope; Clyde Ingalls was side show manager and big show announcer; Frank Schaffer was boss candy butcher; Frank Cook was legal adjuster; George Black was chief of police; Dr. Heferman was the show physician; and Frank McIntyre was in charge of the front door. "Happy" Jack Snellen, big top canvas boss, was also a regular at the staff table. His normal place was at the head of the bosses'



The inside of the Barnum dining tent on July 4, 1917. Pfening Archives.

table on the workingmen's side of the dining tent.

Joe Dan Miller

Joe Dan Miller was every inch a circus man, so versatile that he filled positions in many departments. In the time that I knew the man, 1918 through the 1930s, he had the intelligence and ability to be superintendent of the animals in the menagerie, head of properties, tractors, dining cars, horse tents and the sleeping cars. Prior to the combination Miller had charge of the Ringing Hotel at the Baraboo quarters which housed the bunk house and mess hall for the workingmen.

My first meeting with Joe Dan was on the Ringing Bros. Circus in 1918. At the time he was boss property man. You could always spot Joe Dan as he wore the loudest shirts that money could buy. His favorite was a silk shirt with wide red, white and blue stripes, with collar to match. He never wore a tie. That year they had a super spectacle, When

Waiting to serve in the Barnum dining tent. Pfening Archives.



Knighthood Was In Flower. The scenery took up most of the backside, which had the star back seats and the bandstand. After everything had been cleared away and the circus proper got underway you could find Joe Dan in front of the bandstand in his canvas chair. He would cat nap during the entire afternoon performance. At night it was a different story. He would try to be every place at once. He would be in the middle of the work, either inside or outside, seeing that the prop wagons were being loaded.

Joe Dan Miller had a heart of gold. Never could he turn a man away from the dining room at the Bridgeport winter quarters, especially at Christmas time. At that time Bridgeport was home to many of the workingmen. Some had never worked in winter quarters. Others had to wait until the first of the year to go back to work. Joe welcomed all these men. Of course, they had to wait their turn until all the regular workers were served.

At Christmas time bosses and assistants were invited to bring their wives and children. The men and women who worked in the sail loft cutting and sewing canvas into tents for the circus were also invited. The sail makers worked the year around.

Joe Dan always discouraged any workingman from bringing his girl friend for a meal, especially on Christmas. If a workingman asked to bring his mother, father or a personal friend on Christmas or any other day Joe Dan would pass the information to me and I would find a seat for the guests. It did a person good to see a workingman all dressed, even with a necktie he no doubt borrowed. The faces were

scrubbed red and hair was all slicked back.

Starting with the Christmas of 1925 we had a new innovation for the Christmas dinner. During November or the early part of December Joe Dan had one of the carpenters in winter quarters build shelves the entire length of the long tables in the dining room. They were built to be movable, so that they could be stored and used year after year. The uprights holding the shelf were about eleven inches from the main table top. The one inch shelving board on top of the uprights was about ten inches wide, with a slim slat on each side to hold the "goodies" from rolling off.

The shelves were loaded with oranges, grapes, bananas, apples, small bags of Christmas hard candy, old fashion creams, and circus double jointed peanuts. The candy and peanuts were bagged in the circus stripped peanut bags which held twenty good sized peanuts. Then there were popcorn balls, Cracker Jacks, candy canes, chewing gum and Chiclets.

Also that Christmas we did away with the paper table cloths. They were okay for the first crew of men, but from then on they were a big nuisance. They would get all wet and sloppy when someone would spill something on the table cloth. We had to be careful when we shook the cloths before resetting the table, hoping the paper would not tear. By the time we had reset the tables three or more times the men were eating off the old reliable oil cloth. From that year until the circus moved to Sarasota, Florida in 1927 at Christmas time we would use the old perennials, Ringling cotton table cloths of red and blue checks. We would alternate red and blues on each long table. The contrast was colorful and outstanding.

Not only at Christmas time, but during the entire winter quarter season the knives, forks and spoons were stacked. It was an old custom on the Barnum show. Charles Henry was the steward at the time I was staff waiter. All the waiters had to stack the silver on their tables. In later years on any circus that I was employed in a management position all the tables had the silver stacked. A printed Christmas menu was placed upright along side of the silver.

Joe Dan had small bags of gifts along with a cigar for the boys as they



A section of the mess hall at the Bridgeport winter quarters. Joe Dan Miller is in center back with white jacket and bow tie. John Staley, head waiter, is at his right. Pfening Archives.

went out the door. Perhaps I am wrong and only the cook house crew received surprise bags. I can not remember Joe Dan having a Christmas tree in the dining room.

Joe Dan would always leave all the decorating to me. He would call me into his living room or lounge, as he always called that room, some time before Christmas and say, "Here it is, it is your baby." I would check everything he had bought, then go through the old items from the years before that were usable. Joe Dan was always open for suggestions. All I had to say was that I didn't think his idea would work out or that we needed more of such and such an item. When the time came you could be sure everything was there as ordered, sometimes more than ordered for good measure.

Joe Dan would change the decor each Christmas, which became harder each year as there was only certain set-ups that would fit into the mess hall. Some years it was simple and easy to decorate the large dining hall. One of the most tedious job I ever encountered was the year Joe Dan decided to wire the entire ceiling with fresh evergreens. Luckily we started to square off the wires to hold the evergreens four or five days before Christmas. We were still working on that darn ceiling on Christmas Eve. After it was all wired to the ceiling we strung electric wires with 15 watt white bulbs, spaced at equal distance and with a blinker switch. It really was beautiful, especially at night with the lights blinking off and on. The smell of the evergreen boughs was as if you were in a huge forest after a heavy rain.

Another one of the hard ones was the

time we used crepe paper streamers. We had all the colors of the rainbow and some that would have made the rainbow jealous. Each box of streamers had twelve rolls. It seemed like there were dozens and dozens of boxes. We could not hang the streamers until we had served dinner Christmas eve. Dampness would cause the streamers to sag downward and weaken the paper, as some of the streamers were more than twenty feet in length. At first glance it looked simple but it

turned out to be a nightmare instead of a day dream.

While some of the boys were hanging the streamers others were at work putting up the stage. They had moved the two long center tables to make way for the stage. Weeks before Christmas we borrowed, begged or just made some of the small wooden jacks that had been used by the train crew to jack up the runs so that the wagons could be unloaded from the circus flat cars. We also obtained staging that had been used during the circus season, then we would ransack the side show storage room and borrow some bally cloth to drape around the stage. If the sections of the stage we had borrowed were too long or did not fit the space, we would cut them off to size. After the stage had been erected we would bring Joe Dan's old upright piano from his living room, and place it on the stage that on the morrow would see some of the best entertainment on any stage.

By the time we had finished all the work in the mess hall it was around three o'clock in the morning and almost time to start a new day. We always had a five o'clock call to get breakfast on its way. I would judge when our work would be finished and toward the last half hour or so would walk into the kitchen and ask the chef for a hand out for the workers. Normally I would not get a squawk as the kitchen crew was still roasting turkeys that they had started the day before.

The before-dawn breakfast was never the same, but was always the works. There were platters of ham, bacon, sausage, and eggs, some up and some down. Most of the time there were boiled potatoes with the skins. If the chef had any boiled spuds left from the day before we would have hash browns. Sometimes we had baking

powder biscuits, otherwise we had toast browned on top of one of the stoves. Most of the time it was black. There was always plenty of hot coffee.

When the chef gave me the cue I would go into the dining room and shout "heads up," which was the war cry that it was time to eat. Joe Dan always found time to sit with us on Christmas morning and would say a few words of grace.

The dining hall was situated on the second floor of one of the larger buildings at the Bridgeport quarters. Roughly, the building was sixty feet by two hundred feet in length. The first floor housed all the wood mill and painting equipment. It also had a huge coal burning furnace to heat the entire building.

Besides the mess hall on the second floor there was the kitchen on one side. On the other side was Joe Dan Miller's lounge and sleeping quarters. There was also a private dining room for the staff at winter quarters. On the kitchen side there were six eleven foot tables to serve the bosses and assistants. A wooden screen or wall separated these tables from the workingmen's tables. There were four rows of tables, which consisted of five lengths of eleven foot tables and long benches. At the extreme rear of the mess hall a space was allotted to the harness maker and his assistant. The large high attic which covered the entire length and width of the building was used to store all the harness for the baggage horses. Each fall when the circus came home all the harness that wasn't used in quarters was tagged and marked and then taken to the attic.

During my stay in quarters each year I had my own private sleeping tent in the attic. My first year, Joe Dan promoted one of the concession tents that had been used during the summer. The tent was about twelve by eight feet. It was on the wooden floor, tied off with guy lines to the rafters. Then using one by ten inch shelf boards nailed to the side poles of the tent, I made space for a door and windows. I later purchased some very pretty cretayne and tacked it to the inside boards. The tent was still standing in the attic when the circus moved out of Bridgeport for the last time in the spring of 1927.

The Poli chain of theaters through the New Eng-

Ringling Brothers Wish You a Merry Christmas

MENU

DECEMBER 25th, 1919

SOUPS		
Chicken Gumbo		Oyster Stew
	RELISHES	
Stuffed Olives	Dill Pickles	Bleached Celery
	FISH	
	Baked Mountain Trout, Tartar Sauce	
ENTREES		
Chicken Wings Creamed		Spaghetti a la Italienne
	Baked Stuffed Ham	
	ROASTS	
	Roast Young Turkey, Oyster Dressing	
Brown Gravy		Cranberry Sauce
	Roast Leg of Lamb, Mint Sauce	
VEGETABLES		
Mashed Potatoes		Green Peas
Candied Yams		Asparagus Tips
	SALADS	
Shrimp	Lettuce	Fruit
	DESSERT	
Mince Pie		Pumpkin Pie
Vanilla Ice Cream		Cake
	FRUITS	
Apples	Oranges	Bananas
Candies	Assorted Nuts	
Crackers		Cheese
Tea	Coffee	
J. D. MILLER, Steward		

Printed menu issued for the 1919 winter quarters Christmas dinner. Pfening Archives.

land states had two combination motion picture and vaudeville houses in Bridgeport, one on Main Street and the other on Fairfield Avenue. Both were managed by Matt Saunders.

Saunders and Joe Dan had been the best of friends since the Ringling Brothers circus had moved into the old Barnum quarters. So it was with the greatest of ease that we were able to get top notch acts to entertain the men during

Joe Dan Miller's lounge or rumpus room on Christmas Eve 1924. Miller is at right. Pfening Archives.



the Christmas dinner. Saunders would juggle the acts and moving pictures on Christmas Day at the two theaters so that the performers would not have to rush or worry about time.

Over the years we had some great stars grace our mess hall stage. I will not pick out any certain star; they were all darn good. They put on a better performance for the workingmen than they would at the theater. It seemed as though the word had spread about Joe Dan and his feast. So it was not strange to see faces that had been there before.

The performers would arrive early and stay late. Joe Dan would serve canapes and champagne punch along with cocktails in his lounge. After they had given the final performance to the workingmen they would wait until we had cleared one of the long tables and reset it with steaming hot food. Then along with all the dining room employees they would all sit together and partake of the turkey dinner. The host, Joe Dan, would walk up and down the table pouring choice liqueurs and chatting with his guests. After everyone had more than enough they would arise and with fond goodbyes and happy New Years being said to one and all they would go down stairs to the awaiting cars to take them back to the theaters.

We would make up the surprise bags just for the workingmen. They might contain anything, as Joe Dan was a wild buyer. Mostly the bags contained safety razors, razor blades, after shave lotion, chewing gum, socks, cigarettes and bandana neckerchiefs.

We always delayed Christmas dinner at least a half an hour, for a good reason. On any other day the men would eat at different times, never all together. When everything was all set the orchestra would strike up a march. The doors would open. As the men passed slowly into the mess hall, Joe

Dan would stand inside the door and as the men passed he would give each a surprise bag and a menu. On the way out they were handed a cigar.

I spent many a happy day at the old Barnum quarters. Seemed any year I wanted to work my old job it would be open for me, that being in charge of the mess hall under Joe Dan Miller.

Over the years I have worked under two great stewards in winter quarters. Charles Henry of the Barnum & Bailey show and Joe

Dan Miller, winter quarters steward at Baraboo for the Ringling Bros. and then at Bridgeport for Ringling-Barnum.

Some people might be a little skeptical and remark that being in charge of the mess hall in those distant years was nothing to write home about. Perhaps it was not the greatest job in the world. You must take into consideration that I was only a youngster. My crew would generally consist of old men who could not do any hard labor or were too lazy to try. There were youngsters like myself, and a scattering of winos. At times it kept me on my toes trying to keep a happy balance. I was only a kid of sixteen that first winter.

Hot Dogs

During World War I on the Barnum & Bailey Circus, meat was getting scarce as most of it was being sent overseas to the armed forces. At times it was hard to get the large quantities needed in the cook house to feed the circus personnel. Charles Henry, the steward, could not be too choosy and at times had to take what he could get in the local markets. Whenever possible he would stock pile hot dogs for the concession department.

In those days there was no electricity or refrigeration on any circus cook house. The grocery wagon had a large ice locker in front to keep meat and other perishable food items.

"Dan the butcher" was in charge of the meat department and had three butchers as helpers. In those days food did not come fabricated. They would buy full sides of beef and then do their own butchering. Dan would dole out the hot dogs to the concession department.

This part is the gospel truth as I was there in the middle of all the action. One day, Dan had the ice box cleaned and found six ancient boxes of hot dogs, weighing ten pounds each, that were slimy and full of green mold. He had one of the men dig a hole beside the wagon and buried the hot dogs.

After the dinner meal the cook house tents and equipment were loaded in wagons and taken to the circus train. That same evening the circus had a much larger crowd than expected. The weather had turned cool and the wind was brisk. The two grease joints were getting a big play on their hamburgers and hot dogs.

They ran out of hot dogs be-

fore the night show started. There was no place to buy any and they would not have any for the blow off after the circus let out. Then someone had the bright idea to go over to where the cook house had been and dig up the green, moldy hot dogs. Someone rounded up a box of baking soda. With the soda and water the hot dogs were washed and then rinsed in clear water. After rolling them in hot grease on the griddle they soon were browned in a jiffy. Then they mixed a gob of fried onions to season the dogs. They were back in business for the blow off. Another day, another dollar.

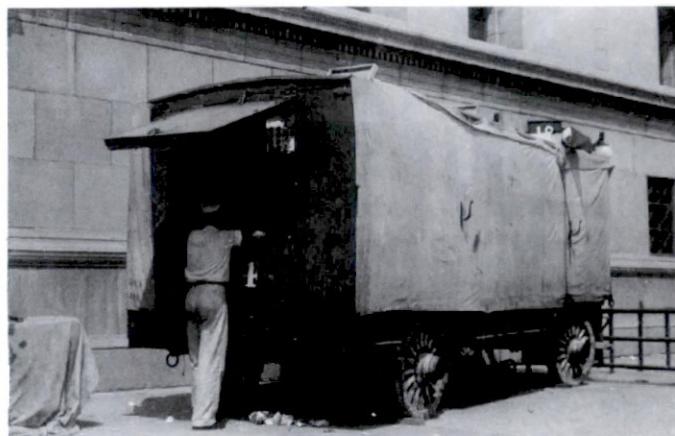
Herbert A. Weaver

During the spring of 1918 I was passing through Greensburg, Pennsylvania on my way home to Uniontown. As the train was slowing down before reaching the depot, I happened to look out the window and was surprised to see a large circus set up on a grassy hill side. When the train stopped in the depot I grabbed my valise and headed to the circus grounds. Window lithographs said it was Ringling Bros. show.

Upon reaching the circus grounds I located the cook house and then saw the commissary wagon. Approaching the wagon I asked the man behind the counter for a route card. He said he was all sold out of route cards. I figured he must of thought I was a towner and did not care to sell me a card.

Walking to the side of the wagon I asked a neatly dressed young man if he would please buy me a route card as the man in the wagon refused me. Taking my nickel, he walked to the front of the wagon and asked for a route card. All of a sudden I heard someone talking loud, as if he were mad. Looking to where the voice was coming from I saw the man in the wagon lean far out and in no un-

The commissary wagon on Ringling-Barnum in the early 1930s. Pfening Archives.



certain language tell me off. He said that if he had route cards he would even sell one to Jesus Christ if he had a nickel, and that he did not like it one bit for someone to contradict his word, nor send someone else to do my bidding.

That was the first time I met Mr. Weaver. The young man turned out to be Cliff Bamull, later a good friend.

The route card episode came up many times as the years rolled along. Bert Weaver always had a big laugh each time he told about the fresh kid that came along wanting a route card.

Commissary wagon No. 6 on the original Ringling Bros. show was the only wagon that was painted green, except for some of the cage wagons. It remained that color until the late thirties when Johnnie North had all the cookhouse wagons painted green.

Wagon No. 6 was the sole domain of Herbert A. Weaver, the human computer. He had a retentive mind, a great ability to remember names and faces. He was a scholarly sort of person. Besides operating the commissary wagon he also was the time keeper for all the workingmen and bosses.

When a man was hired he was given a green slip, which he would take to the doctor's tent where he was examined for venereal diseases, then given a vaccination shot. Then he was sent to the commissary wagon where he was given a number. That number would stay with him until the end of the circus season, or he quit or was discharged.

Those were the golden years of the billowing white tops. Workingmen came and went. Some stayed long enough to fill their bellies and perhaps get money to buy a jug. Others would jump from one circus to another, some only made the subway circuit around New York City. The turnover was enormous. Their number fluctuated between six hundred and eight hundred at any given time.

A workingman only had to be on the circus a short time until Bert would not have to ask his name or number. With up to eight hundred men coming and going he was a computer. At mealtimes it seemed Bert had four or five arms. At times all you could see were arms receiving merchandise they had purchased and Bert putting the amount in one of his six loose leaf files. I believe that the Ringling commissary wagon was the only one that stayed open until the cook house was down.

1897

A lifetime of deceit, lies, greed, thievery, chicanery, thuggery and assorted physical violence came to an end in Wichita, Kansas, when a single bullet ripped through the intestines of Joseph Byron McMahon; yet many of Wichita's leading citizens thought him a kind, compassionate, caring, generous man who was always willing to help those less fortunate than he. McMahon, like a few other showmen--Ben Wallace, Giles Pullman, Willie Sells--was well-behaved at home, but out on the road was a ruthless pirate.

On April 2, 1897, Joseph Byron McMahon was mortally wounded by J. V. Cunningham, a United States marshal from Abilene, Texas. McMahon died at seven o'clock the following morning. Cunningham was in Wichita seeking the arrest of Steve Purdy on a charge of arson in the burning of the Windsor Hotel in Abilene on March 20.

Purdy denied that he had ever been in Abilene. He explained that he had come to Wichita hoping to be hired as a performer on the McMahon show. The Wichita *Daily Beacon* described Purdy as "a rather bright young man," and noted that "Purdy has an open countenance and doesn't look like a bad man. He is emphatic in his protestations of innocence and declares that his arrest is all a mistake. He thinks it will be very unfortunate for him if he is thrown out of a summer's work by being held for trial in a strange town in Texas."

Why McMahon allowed himself to be drawn into the affair can only be explained as loyalty to an employee, or, in the Purdy case, a prospective employee.

On April 2, McMahon went to the Manhattan Hotel, where Cunningham was visiting a friend, to see about releasing Purdy. According to the Wichita *Kansas Star*, "It was evidently his purpose to pick a quarrel with the sheriff, for he commenced to abuse him, and finally called him a very hard name."

All accounts agree that McMahon started a heated argument with Cunningham, but agreement ended there. The shooting occurred in the office of the Manhattan hotel and was witnessed by many.

The Wichita *Daily Eagle* on April 3 described John V. Cunningham as "a small man, probably not more than five feet five inches in height, and weighs 140 pounds. He is 51 years old. His countenance is frank and sober, his eye dark, keen and steady and

ONLY BIG SHOW COMING Kill the Son of a Bitch

Vol. V. Chapter I By Orin Copple King

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there is nothing in his face to suggest a man of extravagant action.

"He is a deputy United States marshal, and not a deputy sheriff, as has been rumored.

"I came here,' he said, 'last Wednesday in search of one Purdy, who is charged with burning a hotel in Abilene, Texas. I went to your sheriff, showed him a letter and my papers. I did nothing further then until Sheriff Cone found the man last night. I asked Mr. Purdy if he would go without requisition papers and he said he would. This morning he refused to go and I took steps to secure a requisition. This afternoon I was in a room in the hotel--I don't remember the name of it--talking to Mr. Pratt when someone knocks at the door. Mr. Pratt opened the door and the manager stated that Mr. McMahon wanted to see me down stairs. I went down and he told me that I was meddling and had no authority to arrest this man and take him away. I told him that I had not arrested him, that the local officer here had done that and that the Texas sheriff would be here to take him."

Joseph B. McMahon, the grifting circus man.
Pfening Archives.

"You shan't take him,' said Mr. McMahon.

"I told him to get his habeas corpus and retain the man according to law. 'Damn the law,' he said, 'you are a fraud you d_d s_o a b___. At this Mr. McMahon whipped out a gun and fired, and I did the same. I am not positive about the number of times I shot. I think I fired three times, and I am satisfied that I fired twice, though in the excitement I might have been mistaken as to the exact number of shots. I am con-

fident that he fired once at least and I think twice.'

"When the police came in I surrendered and asked to be taken to the county jail. I went with the police and gave up my gun.

"I never met this Mr. McMahon and did not know him till I came here. I had no occasion to injure him except in self defense and that's why I did it. I am very sorry that it should have happened. I was sheriff of Taylor county fourteen years, and this is the first time I ever had to hurt anybody."

Both the *Eagle* and the *Beacon* carried eye-witness accounts of the shooting. The *Eagle* began with, "T. P. BONE'S STATEMENT

"Mr. T. P. Bone of this city said: 'I was sitting in a chair here,' he said, indicating in the recess of the east front window of the Manhattan Hotel, 'when I heard what I thought to be an explosion of dynamite, and I ran out the door. After being outside I looked in through the window and I saw Mr. McMahon down on the floor with his head resting against the railing between the door and the office counter. Mr. Cunningham was on the inside of the railing and as he came outside he walked by Mr. McMahon holding his gun on him all the time. Just then the policeman came in, took the revolver from Mr. Cunningham and that is all I know about it. I don't believe I would know Mr. Cunningham now if saw him.'

JOHN BROWN'S STORY

"John Brown is the bootblack in Jake Martin's barber shop. John said, 'I shined Mr. McMahon's shoes a little while before the shooting occurred. The first thing I knew of the shooting was I heard a shot, and just then a man that was in Jake's chair getting shaved jumped to his feet and ran behind the stove and then edged himself

under the billiard table. I ran around the cigar case to see what was going on and I saw Mr. McMahon on the floor and saying to somebody 'Kill the _____, he has killed me.' Just then I saw the policeman come in and get the man.'

FRED VAN DINE

"Mr. Fred Van Dine, the manager of the hotel, stated in substance that he



was up stairs when Mr. McMahon and Mr. Cunningham met in the hotel office and as he came down stairs he heard some hard words uttered. He thought that if he was not mistaken that both of them drew pistols about the same time, but he did not think Mr. McMahon's pistol went off. What occurred afterward is about the same as stated by others. It was stated on the street that Mr. Van Dine had said that Mr. McMahon did not have a revolver at all. This is not true. Mr. Van Dine stated to a reporter that Mr. McMahon not only had a revolver, but he reached for his revolver about the same time the other man did.

"ANOTHER STATEMENT"

"During the whole trouble there was standing in the rear of the room one well known Wichita man who, for reasons, did not want to get involved in the future settlement of the trouble. He said: 'I saw the whole thing. A man named Clark went up stairs and came down with Mr. Cunningham and as the latter and Mr. McMahon talked Clark who stood kind of between them, leaned back against the office counter. I could not hear all of the conversation, but I heard McMahon say: 'It's a damned lie.' and soon after say: 'You damned ---, I will settle this thing with you now.' Just then both of them pulled their guns together and shot. To the best of my knowledge I think McMahon fired one shot and Cunningham three shots. That's the straight of the thing and I don't want to be mixed up in the matter at all.'

"LOUIS WARD'S STATEMENT"

"Louis Ward who helped to take Mr. McMahon up stairs said: 'I helped to take Mr. McMahon up stairs and when we laid him down on the bed he said: 'If my gun went off I would fix the ---'."

In another column the *Eagle* related that, "After Mr. McMahon was shot he was conveyed to one of the rooms on the second floor of the Manhattan hotel and doctors summoned. They found that one bullet had entered the side, penetrated the intestine and lodged against the vertebrae. They very soon located the bullet and knowing the condition of the wound proceeded to place the patient under opiates and proceeded to do all that medical skill could suggest to save his life. Before being placed under the influence of opiates, however, he dictated a statement of the occurrence, and it is understood, made his will. He dictated the statement to T. A. Sullivan, a notary and also stenographer in the office of Amidon & Conley.

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THE FINEST SPECIMENS OF BRUTE CREATION EXTANT.
Many of which are now for the first time placed on exhibition.

Magnificent Re-Production of the Ancient Roman Hippodrome
Imperially embodying in matchless perfection an exhibition which others can only imitate in name. Groups of champion chariooteers and jockeys.

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Strange and peculiar monster amphibia and reptilia Birds and Beasts from every land and climate; impaling array of prominent performers, the elite of equestrians in the profession. Three great rings in simultaneous operation.

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TWO GRAND EXHIBITIONS DAILY, RAIN OR SHINE
USUAL PRICE OF ADMISSION. DOOR OPEN AT 1 and 7 P.M.

Will Exhibit at NEODESHA **April 20.**
TUESDAY.

This MacMahon newspaper ad appeared in the Neodesha *Register* on April 20, 1897. Kansas State Historical Society.

"MCMAHON'S STATEMENT"

"I had an argument with a man named Mr. Cunningham with reference to Purdy. I told him he was a liar and he pulled a gun and shot me three times. I had a gun but had no time to draw until I was shot. No threats were made by either one. He first pulled the gun out and whacked away. After I fell he reached over and fired again at me. I had no hard feelings at the man and no threats had been made in either side in the argument. I made no threats against him. I made no motion to pull my gun before he shot me. I carry a gun because I live out in a lonely locality and go home late at night and carry large sums of money on my person. J. B. M'MAHON."

"Mrs. McMahon was at the bedside of her husband soon after the occurrence and remained with him all night. She showed remarkable courage under such a trying ordeal."

Coroner Rose held an inquest on April 5 and the *Beacon* reported the proceedings. D. Lampard was the first to appear and was fined five dollars for an unspecified reason. Lampard said, "I live in Wichita and work at the Manhattan Hotel and was at the hotel on the 2nd of April. I know McMahon and have seen Cunningham. McMahon came there and asked me to go to Mr. Pratt's room and ask him to come down. He and McMahon talked and Pratt went up stairs, and he Cunningham came down together. They did not talk loud; they seemed to be in good humor. I heard McMahon say, 'We ought to have a settlement.' I turned round and when I looked back I saw Cunningham step back and draw his revolver and fire. Mr. McMahon was hit by one of the balls. It was done so quickly I cannot tell how many shots were fired; seemed to be three or four. McMahon staggered around and fell behind one of the railing partitions. He was wounded. I ran out and did not hear what was said. They did not seem to be angry. I helped to carry him up stairs. Do not know that either had been drinking. I did not see Mr. McMahon have any gun.'

"J. C. Clark was the next witness. He said: 'I live at Cincinnati, Ohio. Have been in the city since December 20. I am with McMahon's circus. I was at the Manhattan Hotel on the 2nd of the month. I know Mr. McMahon. He came to his death about 3:30 Friday afternoon. McMahon was there in the office. He was standing by the ledger desk. There was a man with him whose name I have now learned is Pratt. McMahon stated to Pratt that he would like to have Cunningham called down stairs, as he desired to see him. Pratt went up and they came down together. Then McMahon said: 'I have reason to believe that you are impersonating an officer.' Cunningham said that is not true. McMahon said you are a d---d liar. Then Cunningham stepped back and commenced firing. After Pratt got out of the way and after Mr. McMahon was shot, I saw him trying to get out his own revolver. He [McMahon] advanced and guarded off the second shot with his left hand. I did not see the third shot. I was crouched behind the counter. Mr. McMahon ran right by me and said 'Get out my gun and kill the man that has killed me.' I got Mac's gun and raised up, but was looking into Cunningham's revolver. He said: 'You move and I will send you into eternity.' I did not move; that is sure. Cunningham moved back, still

covering McMahon and myself with his revolver.

"The officer came and everything was all excitement. Mr. Allen and the policeman were then scrambling for the possession of McMahon's gun. Cunningham started out the front door. I went out another door. When I got up by the bakery I caught Cunningham by the coat and said: 'I will take you to the lock-up.' When we got up by Lawrence Avenue, he ordered me to take my hand off his coat. I hit him with my fist and then an officer came up and I turned him over.

"C. W. Bennett said: 'I run a railroad ticket office in the Manhattan building. Have been in the city for two years. I was in my office last Friday. I know Mr. McMahon. Saw him several times that day. He was proprietor of the circus. I was there when the shooting occurred, but did not see it. I saw Mr. McMahon after he was shot. I saw Cunningham with his gun still pointed at McMahon after he fell. I did not hear Cunningham say anything. I ran over to where Joe was shot. I then ran for a doctor. Mr. McMahon, he said: "This man has killed me: won't somebody get him." Cunningham was arrested but did not make any resistance.'

"John Pratt said: 'I live at Abilene, Texas. Have been here six months. I am in the grain business. I reside at the Manhattan hotel. I was there on the 2nd day of April. I was acquainted with Mr. McMahon. I saw him there that day. Mr. Cunningham was with him. Cunningham and McMahon were talking apparently friendly. They were talking about this man Purdy. McMahon asked Cunningham what his position was in this matter. He said he had nothing to do with it; that the requisition papers would be here for the man. McMahon said that was a d—d lie. Cunningham said I understand my business and I want you to leave me alone.'

"McMahon said: 'I have done some telegraphing and I think you are a fraud.' Then he made a motion toward Mr. Cunningham and said: 'Do you know what I think of you? I think you are a -----.' As he said that he threw his hand behind him under his coat. Mr. Cunningham jumped back and as he jumped he said 'What?' and went for his gun. I said 'For God's sake, don't shoot him. He shot.'

"After the shooting I ran around by the cigar stand. I could not tell if both had shot or not. I know Mr. Cunningham did. When I came back from the cigar stand Mr. McMahon, was laying

on floor calling for some one to take his gun and shoot him, meaning Mr. Cunningham. There was someone stooped over with the gun in their hand. Mr. Cunningham standing over him, saying 'I don't want to hurt you but will have to if you raise that gun.' I said, 'For God's sake, John, don't shoot anymore!' He came around the partition then, and backed toward the door and gave his gun up to a policeman who came in at that time. The policeman pushed him out of the door and came back and took another gun away from a man who was trying to get out the door."

Dr. J. C. Hoffman testified that, "I am a practicing physician and surgeon, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. I was acquainted with Joseph McMahon and I saw him that day. He was a man of magnificent physique and in the neighborhood of six feet high and weighed about 200 pounds. I saw him on the 2nd of April, on a bed in the Manhattan Hotel: he was shot. He was suffering intense pain. The ball perforated four of the smaller intestines. Death was the result. It was a fatal wound. I was with him from half past three until he died the next morning. McMahon was about 34 years of age. I heard McMahon make a statement. He said he was going to die. I encouraged him all I could but I thought the shot fatal."

During cross examination Dr. Hoffman stated, "There were powder burns on Mr. McMahon's left hand and a slight wound on the little finger. There

self performed the operation. The ball was taken out after death. The deceased never recovered from the shock of the operation but he was conscious. If he had recovered from the first shock of wound and operation he would have had a chance for life. He made his statement just before we performed the operation. No anesthetics had been administered before he made his statement. I think the undertaker has the ball we took from the body. The wound would have been fatal without the operation."

Guy Richmond, a hack driver, testified that, "I saw the gentleman they call Mr. Cunningham fire one shot. He was talking to Mr. McMahon who said 'You are a d—d liar.' Cunningham drew his revolver and shot immediately. I did not hear Cunningham say a word. I got down on the floor and crawled behind the partition. Mr. McMahon walked about fifteen feet and fell behind the temporary partition near Mr. Clark. There was nothing to have prevented Mr. Cunningham from getting away from McMahon. I noticed that McMahon's hand was powder burned. I saw McMahon when he fell. He was leaning on one side with his gun in his hand. He looked like he fell on it."

On cross examination Richmond stated, "I saw Mr. McMahon's revolver under him and his hand on it after he was down. It looked to me like he had fallen on his back. Clark reached over

and got it. Clark laid the gun down and Allen picked it up. I was there until McMahon was taken up stairs. I heard him say to Clark, 'Take that gun and shoot the man; he has killed me.'

When called to the stand McMahon's widow testified, "My name is Lenora McMahon. J. B. McMahon is my husband; was at home the night before the tragedy, and went up town in the morning at the usual hour. He said he was going to see Bitting about opening the show for the benefit of the Chandler, [Oklahoma, tornado] sufferers. I saw him shortly after he was shot. He was conscious. We have two children, one aged two years and the other aged eight months."

The shooting was seen variously by the eye-witnesses.

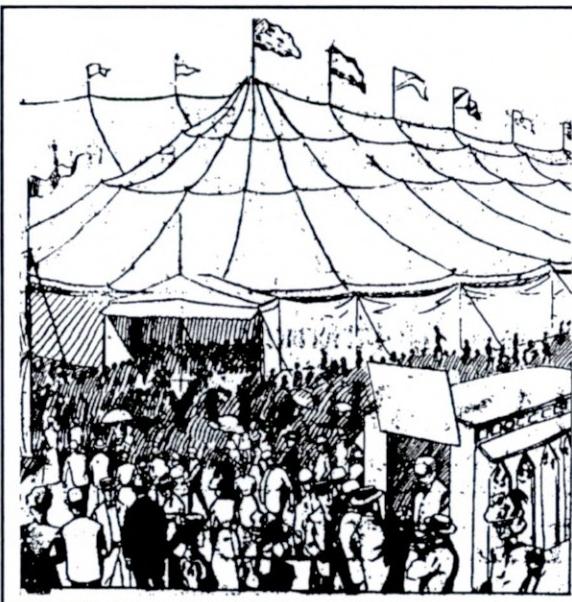
J. C. Clark saw McMahon's cane but no gun.

Albert Lampard saw neither a cane nor a gun.

C. B. Bennett heard three shots.

Officer Harry Sutton said one gun fired three times, the other not once.

Ed Curby saw McMahon holding a gun.



may have been some powder burns on his right hand. I did not probe for the ball. I was present when McMahon signed the statement. There was an operation performed from 5 to 7 p.m. Can not tell exact time. Dr. Purdue and my

Albert J. Christman saw McMahon holding a gun with both hands.

An unidentified witness said both men pulled guns.

According to a short piece by Harry W. Cole in *Circus Report*, July 13, 1992, George Holland reported that, "McMahon was carrying a baby in one arm, and as he spoke to the sheriff, he dropped his other hand on his hip, a characteristic position, but the sheriff construed that as a move toward a gun, and he banged away at McMahon, claiming self defense." If George Holland was present at the shooting he was unseen by all the witnesses and there is no mention of his presence. Only Holland saw the baby.

One observation that especially disturbed the press was the fact that both men were Masons. Cunningham's Masonic ring was clearly visible and only a blind man could fail to see the Masonic symbol on McMahon's watch chain. Brothers are not always Brothers.

The following announcement appeared in the *Beacon* the day before the funeral: "SCOTTISH RITE. MEMBERS INVITED TO ATTEND FUNERAL OF MR. M'MAHAN (sic).

"Members of Elmo Lodge of Perfection, No. 9, A. A. S. R., are requested to be present at the Scottish Rite Cathedral promptly at 2:45 o'clock Sunday in the afternoon, to participate in the funeral services of the Rite over the body of Bro. Joseph Byron McMahon (sic)."

A circus press agent could not have covered the funeral better than did the *Beacon*. "PROFOUND GRIEF.

"Wichita Citizens Exhibit Their Sorrow for the Death of Joseph Byron McMahon, Who Fell a Victim to A DEADLY ONSLAUGHT.

"Young, Generous and Sturdy, His Kindness and Liberality Are Recalled on Every Hand By Those Who Knew Him. HIS MANY VIRTUES Are Emphasized and Citizens Are Sore at the Event.

The funeral services over the remains of Joseph Byron McMahon took place at the Scottish Rite Cathedral yesterday afternoon.

"Joe' McMahon, as his friends called him, was, in many respects a remarkable man. He was not yet 30 (sic) years of age, but his name was known all over the South and West. He was pushing himself to the front in his profession and if he had been spared a few years longer it is not improbable that he would have become king of showmen.

"The man who can successfully over-

come obstacles and command men as did Joe McMahon, is more than mediocre. He had the mind and courage and persistency that would have forced him to the front in any other calling; that he had in him that attracts the men who

Instead of censuring the man who had done the shooting, people were telling of the generous acts of the dead man."

The obituary also mentioned that McMahon was a graduate of the law school of "Michigan university" but had never practiced.

Conveniently, there was no mention of the pockets picked out on the road, the beatings given recalcitrant employees, the cheating of townspeople, robberies, the red-lighting of abandoned employees and countless other acts of greed and gratuitous violence.

On April 8 the *Beacon* published a will signed by McMahon and dated March 24, 1896.

"In the name of God, amen. I, Jos. B. McMahon, being of sound mind and memory, but knowing the uncertainties of human life, do now make and publish this my last will and testament that is to-wit: I desire my property to be left to wife and son, Lenora McMahon and Chas. McMahon, my son. JOSEPH BYRON MCMAHON. Witnesses: John L. Powell, Ed Goldberg."

A second son was born after the date of the will.

On April 10 Cunningham was released on \$10,000 bail and left for his home in Taylor county Texas. He appreciated the kindness and respect shown him during his stay in the Wichita jail and expressed his thanks to the city through a story in the *Eagle*.

On May 20 the Cunningham trial was postponed until September due to the unavailability of several witnesses. The charges against Cunningham were dropped when the trial opened in Judge Dale's court on September 20 and the shooting was defined as self-defense.

McMahon's will was recorded in Probate Court, Sedgwick County, Wichita, Kansas, on April 7 1897, as Case 2042. The widow, Lenora McMahon, was appointed administratrix under a bond of \$5,000. Listed as the only heirs at law were the widow and Charles McMahon, two years old and Joseph Byron McMahon, eight months.

A journal entry, April 15, at the request of Mrs. McMahon, ordered her to "employ a sufficient number of men to properly care for the said personal property and to purchase feed and other articles necessary to give the said personal property good and careful attention and to pay for the same.

"The Court after being further advised in the premise finds that the best interests of the estate require that said personal property be sold at



are prominent in the commercial enterprises of the day has been abundantly demonstrated in this city.

"He was a remarkable student of human nature, and his friends were not confined to any one class. If he would remove his hat in the presence of the President of the United States he would also fight for a bootblack if the bootblack were wrongfully imposed upon. This trait in his character made the humblest citizens his friends. Prominent business men, laboring men, and the high priests of Masonry, who esteem men only for their moral worth, all yesterday added their tribute to form a wreath of love with which to adorn the tomb of Mr. McMahon.

"Rev. Von Herrlich read the solemn service of the Episcopal Church. He read a portion of the Fifteenth Chapter of Corinthians, and closed with prayer and the benediction, after which the Scottish Rite Masons took charge. The ceremony was solemn and imposing. The Masons concluded their services at the vault at the cemetery where the remains were deposited temporarily. Eighty vehicles containing people followed the funeral car and about thirty more met the funeral procession at the cemetery

"Early yesterday morning people were on the streets, inquiring about the funeral and whether any but Masons could attend the services at the Masonic Cathedral. They instinctively turned their steps toward the Manhattan Hotel, where the warm heart blood of generous Joe McMahon had been spilled and all day there was a crowd at that place. People seemed to think that the people of the hotel would know all.

"People did not seem to be indignant as they were on the day of the killing. Indignation had given way to profound regret that the calamity had happened.

public sale, first giving notice for two weeks thereof by publication in the *Daily Beacon* for two weeks continuously and that said sale occur on Saturday, May 1, 1897, at 10 o'clock A.M., and that said property be sold in bulk, for cash. JUDGE J. N. HAYMAKER."

In her request for early sale of the property Mrs. McMahon stated, "That the said personal property consists of a large number of horses and animals, show tents and other personal property usually connected with a show; that the interest of the estate demand that said property be kept up in proper condition; that the stock and animals be given good care and attention; that a portion of the stock consists of wild animals such as elephants, bears, camels, lions, deer, etc., and it requires special care and attention to keep the said stock in good condition; that it requires much time and expense and a large number of men to keep the said stock in proper condition, and that the interest of the estate demand that said property be kept in proper condition so the same can be sold at sale and that the said property will sell at a large and better amount if properly and duly cared for during the time the same is in the hands of the Administratrix.

"And your administratrix further gives the court to understand and be informed that the best interest of the estate demand that said property be sold forthwith either at private or public sale which ever to the court may seem best; that the expenses of keeping the same are large; the present season is the best season to sell and dispose of said property."

Attached to the request was an inventory and appraisement dated April 8 conducted by Edwin Taylor, George Locke and John B. McMahon (sic).

40 head work horses	\$400.00
15 head work horses	225.00
5 Burros	15.00
1 Mule	15.00
5 Ring Horses	300.00
4 Bears	60.00
2 Bear Cubs	20.00
2 Camels?	400.00
2 Elephants, Venice	\$1000, Topsy
\$1200,	2200.00
1 Zouga or Zebra	400.00
2 Lions male and female	200.00
1 Baby Lion	20.00
3 Monkeys	12.00
2 Mexican Hogs	20.00
1 Deer	10.00
1 Seal	50.00
4 Goats	16.00
9 Baggage Wagons	315.00
1 Lumber Wagon	15.00
1 Band Wagon	75.00
10 Cage Wagons	450.00

1 Old Worn Out Wagon	5.00
1 Trunk Wagon	50.00
1 Ticket Wagon	75.00
1 Buck Board	10.00
1 Cart	5.00
17 Sets Old Harness	59.50
1 Show Tent, Ropes and Poles	150.00
1 Manager's Tent	80.00
1 Side Show Tent	25.00
1 Dressing	Tent
10.00	
1 Horse Tent	10.00
30 lengths of seats with fixtures	120.00
8 lengths of reserved seats	50.00
5 Star burners tanks	
40.00	
1 Stake puller	5.00
7 Sledges	2.50
5 Shovels	1.00
Properties & wardrobes	25.00
5 Flat RR Cars	800.00
2 Stock RR Cars	
320.00	
1 RR Coach	200.00
Iron from burned cars	
20.00	
1 Lot adv. show paper	
200.00	
Total \$7,461.00	

The sale was held on the west steps of the court house. A crowd of the curious attended the sale, but was disappointed by the lack of spectacle. The show property was not to be seen. The entire inventory was disposed of in one sale to a show employee, C. D. Allen, for \$6,000. Allen was acting as agent for Mrs. McMahon.

Another chattel mortgage in the amount of \$2,700 was held by the United States Printing Company of Cincinnati, Ohio.

George Costello, one of the most notorious grifters of his time, had been a partner of Joe McMahon for five years prior to the shooting. Together they operated Howe & Cushing, Sands & Astley and in 1896 Bond Bros. The shows prospered poorly and Costello, in January 1897 demanded an accounting of partnership affairs. Costello was a thief at heart, but Joe McMahon was even sharper.

To forestall litigation that promised disaster McMahon entered a first mortgage with his wife for \$6,012.36 on January 16, 1897. Two days later, January 18, the McMahon-Costello partnership was dissolved. On April 21 Costello filed suit against the estate claiming fraud in the dissolution of the partnership. The *Daily Beacon* reported Costello as claiming that "the capital stock of the firm was \$20,000, and that he owned a one-



third interest. Costello must have thought there was a good deal of water in that stock, because he admits that on the 18th day of last January he transferred all his interest in the show to McMahon for \$400."

In his suit Costello demanded \$5,100 damages "by reason of the false and fraudulent representations made to him by the said J. B. McMahon and his agents to sell his interests in said partnership property."

Costello further claimed that Lenora McMahon never had \$6,000 at any time, that her parents were low salaried employees of McMahon who could not possibly have accumulated such a sum.

To counter Costello's claim that she never had \$6,000 Mrs. McMahon explained that the money was the life savings of her parents and was given to her as her mother lay dying. Lenora received the money in a cloth bag which she showed to a *Beacon* reporter.

At the auction, according to the *Kansas Commoner*, May 6, Costello made a bid of \$2,500 on the elephants, but Mr. Amidon who conducted the sale told him he could not entertain his bid unless he would show the money. "Mr. Costello not offering to produce the money his bid was rejected."

There is pleasure in the conning of a woman, and George Costello was choking on his own gullibility. The suit was useless.

The court approved the following expenditures:

Undertaker	\$151.00
Physician	250.00
Care of Property	498.83
Probate Court	150.00
Administratrix	750.00
Attorney Fees	550.00
Printing	10.40
R. M. Piatt	50.00
	\$2410.23

I. W. Gill, undertaker, billed the estate as follows: "April 3, 1897. Casket. Zinc box, Embalming, Washing, Shaving & Hearse Service 145.00. April 4 Two Carriages for Bearers 6.00. TOTAL \$151.00"

Following approval of the above the court on June 29 withdrew.

Against the mortgage of \$6,012.66 Lenora McMahon received circus property with an estimated value of \$3,589.77.

In closing the case Mrs. McMahon swore, "That the estate is wholly insolvent and there are not any means under the control of the said administratrix with which to pay any further debts against the said estate; that she has paid out all the money derived from the sale of the said property and has not now any further money under control and does not know where she will be able to procure any further proceeds of the said estate."

The United States Printing Company received nothing.

Before the shooting, plans for opening the McMahon Bros. season of 1897 were well underway. "McMahon's show folks," according to the *Kansas Star*, Wichita, March 27, "are preparing for 'hitting the road.' They will open their season in this city with a benefit for the Auditorium, as they did last year."

The *Kansas Commoner*, April 1, reported that, "McMahon, the show man, has just received two magnificent advance cars. The cars are just from the shop and were built specially for McMahon's show, and are as finely fixed up and decorated inside and out as it is possible to make cars. The cars will be started on the road in a few days to bill the towns for the big show."

Why a 12 car show would need two advance cars is difficult to understand. Perhaps the *Commoner* did not have an accurate description of the cars.

On April 8 the *Commoner* stated, "The advertising car for the McMahon show started out this week. The show will open the season in Wichita on the 17th (April) and the billboards are covered with the regular circus posters."

Eureka was billed for Monday, April 19, followed by Neodesha on April 20. Both dates and the Wichita opening date were canceled because of problems related to the death of McMahon.

The first performances of 1897 were given in Wichita on July 9 and 10. The tents were pitched on a lot south of the city building. The *Commoner* reported that the show played "to good audiences." On Monday the show left for Hutchinson.

"A traveling man," according to the *News*, "who has seen MacMahon Bros. show, said today: 'It is not the biggest show on earth and they don't ask the biggest prices, but it is the best little show I ever saw in my life. They give the people just what they claim and nothing more. They don't claim to have as big a show as Barnum & Bailey, Forepaugh or the Ringling Bros., but they give a nice, clean amusing show, and as their prices are only 10 and 20 cents your people here are bound to

MacMahon Bros.
Railroad Shows
EXHIBIT AT
**HUTCHINSON,
MONDAY, July 12.**
**The Largest and Best
Popular Priced Canvas
Show In America . . .**
Innumerable Arenic Features.
Superb Musical Organizations.
Marvelous Trained Horses,
Skilled Equestrian Talent.
**The Biggest and Best
Show for the Money
Ever Conceived . . .**
**Admission 10 and 20 Cents.
2 Performances Daily.
Doors Open at 1 and 7 p. m.
Seating Capacity for 4,000 People.**

This MacMahon Bros. newspaper ad appeared in the July 9, 1897 Hutchinson *Daily News*. Kansas State Historical Society.

get their money's worth.

"MacMahon Bros.' show will be in Hutchinson next Monday afternoon and evening."

The Hutchinson *Clipper* carried no formal advertisement but ran several short statements in its news columns.

"Street Parade Monday.

"The MacMahon Bros. Mammoth railway show will be in Hutchinson Monday July 12.

"See the grand troupe of Arabian horses next Monday evening at the tent show.

"The great Japanese jugglers can be seen at the MacMahon Brothers big tent show Monday July 12.

"Admission only 10 and 20 cents to the great tent show next Monday July 12.

"See the Trained Shetland Ponies next Monday afternoon and evening at the big tent, only 10 and 20 cent admission.

"Wonderful Educated Horses, Donkeys and Dogs, at MacMahon Bros., Great Tent show next Monday afternoon and night, admission only 10 and 20

cents. Watch for the street parade.

"Prof. Knuppel's Operatic and Military band is a pleasing feature in the MacMahon Bros. railway show which is to appear in this city Monday July 12. Everybody wants to go, 10 and 20 cents admission.

"The largest enterprise of its kind in the West, MacMahon Brothers Big 10 and 20 cent show. Innumerable Arenic Features, a perfect cavalcade of new and novel acts. The best trained animal exhibits ever conceived, will exhibit at Hutchinson Monday July 12th. Two performances. Doors open at one and seven p. m."

Following the Hutchinson exhibitions the *Clipper* ran a press agent story titled "Dan Rice Outdone" complete with a portrait of Dan Rice.

"There was a time, years ago, during the childhood of many who saw the performance of Monday, that the name of Dan Rice was connected with the greatest one ring circus ever seen. But the performance of the MacMahon Bros. circus after Monday was as far ahead of any seen in the days gone by, as electricity is ahead of the days of fast horses in conveying our messages across the continent. It was the neatest, cleanest and most refined circus performance ever seen in Hutchinson. The bareback riding of Lowando was a feature of the show. Hamilton the hurdle rider, and although of a different style, was equally fine in his act. The aerial performers were sensational in their acts, while the horizontal bar performers and tumblers were equal to any performers in the profession. Prof. McLaughlins performing horses, ten in number, were without doubt the great feature of the show. Their intelligence is remarkable, and they seem endowed with human intelligence. Another thing noticed about this show, is the decorous treatment afforded the ladies and children, uniformed ushers escort them to comfortable seats, and the large tent was emptied without the usual pushing and crowding noticed in general at larger circuses. May they come again! A cordial greeting awaits them."

The *Clipper* was pleased to report that, "One very noticeable feature in the MacMahon circus Monday, was the total absence of any fakes or ruffians which usually follow shows. The MacMahon Bros. have the reputation of carrying a clean first class circus and the bums of the country haven't any desire to follow them."

The *Harvey County Banner*, Newton, had no kind words for the exhibitions there on July 13. "Last Tuesday a small circus from Wichita erected its canvas on the corner of Main and Sev-

enth streets and exhibited to a very small audience. Taken altogether it was about the hardest looking lay out that has been within our corporate limits for some time and the Peerless Princess (City of Newton) is to be congratulated on their exodus."

The Newton *Kansan* made only two references to the show.

"The circus didn't do a thing to one of the telephone poles in the block where the tent was pitched. A loaded wagon collided with a guy wire and broke the pole.

"One of the circus wagons fell off a flat car this morning. One of the hands was struck by the wagon and badly bruised about the arm. Another barely escaped serious injury by being run over during the unloading."

Emporia saw the McMahon show on July 14. A press agent story in the *Daily Republican* on show day stated that, "The concert given by this company is of a vaudeville nature, and is of a refined and modest character. It is a performance rather expected to be found in an opera house than under canvas. Each specialty was new, well rendered and especially entertaining."

The *Republican* reported that, "Yesterday was circus day in Emporia, the day when men and women indulge their own desires under the excuse of gratifying the children. In both the afternoon and evening a large audience was present and seemed greatly pleased with the performances.

"There is always one advantage in a one-ring circus--a spectator can see the whole show. There are fewer performers acting at one time. Attention is not divided between a half dozen different feats. You don't go away feeling that you have missed half the show. For a one-ring circus the McMahon Brothers' show was a good one. All the performers were artists. Many of the feats were difficult and daring, and evinced a remarkable skill. It is the verdict of everyone that McMahon's Bros.' is the best one-ring circus that ever gave a performance in Emporia."

The Emporia *Gazette* ran the "Dan Rice Outdone" handout without the engraving of Dan.

"The circus was good," the *Gazette* claimed. "It told no lies, gave a good clean performance, and had only a small crowd. There was no menagerie to give the papas and mammas an excuse for taking the children. McMahon Bros. have fine performers which keeps the one ring interesting during the entire entertainment."

On July 27 the *Gazette* remarked that, "The McMahon show which was here last week is having trouble on account of low wages paid the help."

The Hutchinson *Clipper*, August 4, reported that, "The cooks and dish washers of the McMahon circus struck at Atchison. There were enough dish washers among the performers to save the day."

The Ottawa *Daily Republican*, reporting the exhibitions there on July 15, dealt harshly with the show.

First, readers were warned that, "There is said to be an unusual number of toughs with the alleged 'circus' outfit



that is here today. It will be wise to take extra precautions with door fastenings tonight."

In another column, "'McMahon Bros.' Great Shows' is a fraud. It patterns itself on the public as a 'circus,' but in reality is of the 10 cent class of exhibitions, and inferior at that. The license here for a 'circus' is \$100; this outfit pays \$10 and kicked about that. It came into town this morning on some flat cars, and its wagons are so old and worthless that one of them fell to pieces at the depot. The concern hasn't backing enough to put up decent paper--a few colored stock window lithographs comprised its efforts in that direction. Mighty few people even cared to ask where the tent was pitched."

On July 16 and 17 the show exhibited again in Wichita for reasons unexplained.

McMahon Bros. played Topeka July 19 and 20. According to the *Topeka State Journal* of July 17, "The Mac-Mahon (sic) Bros. are now making their 20th annual tour and will give two performances daily at the corner of Fourth and Jefferson streets, Monday and Tuesday, doors opening at one and seven o'clock. Admission 10 and 20 cents."

On the 20th the *Journal*, an evening paper, reported an unusual event. "McMahon Brothers' circus paraded through the principal streets of North Topeka this morning. This is the first

time this side has been honored by a circus parade since July 14, 1894, when Sells Brothers brought their show on this side."

Dorety's Dog Circus opened in Leavenworth on Sunday night, July 18, at Korman's Park. Featured were The Sisters Millar, Banjo Specialties, Singing, Dancing and Miss Isabelle Rousseau's Classical Songs. Matinees Wednesday and Saturday. Admission 10 Cents.

Directly below Dorety's ad was the small ad of McMahon's Circus, spelled once again "MacMahon." The circus was billed for July 21, 22. The tent was raised on the Ft. Leavenworth reservation.

The Leavenworth *Standard* of July 21, reported that, "It was late this afternoon when the cavalcade of MacMahon Bros.' show moved through the streets of the city. The delay was occasioned by a railroad accident which blockaded their travel for several hours in consequence of which no performance was given this afternoon.

"The show, in some respects, is a return to first principles, the performance being given in one ring. As such it will be a welcome relief to those who have been under the necessity of undergoing a sanitarium treatment in order to relieve the tired feeling in the neck and the buzzing of the wheels in the head that follow rubber-necking one of the three ring affairs.

"MacMahon Bro's show comes well recommended by the press of the state as being a bright, clean show with plenty of energy and go in it. They have an aggregation of clever performers with them that never fails to please. Hamilton, the hurdle rider, gives a dashing exhibition while the aerialists and horizontal bar gymnasts are said to do some truly startling feats.

"The troupe of ten performing horses exhibited by Prof. McLaughlin, have been carefully coached and are accredited with almost human intelligence. They attracted considerable attention in the parade.

"The show exhibits this and tomorrow evenings with a matinee tomorrow afternoon."

The public, according to the *Standard*, was pleased with the show. "The performance given by McMahon Bros.' aggregation last night was a very creditable and without a doubt it is one of the best shows for the price now on the road. Those who attended feel that their money was well spent.

"The tent was comfortably filled and the audience an appreciative one.

"The performers were without a single exception far above the average usually seen with the smaller shows and feats performed by them was generously applauded. The attendance this afternoon was good. Tonight's performance will close the engagement here."

While in Leavenworth two show wagons which had broken down were repaired. "One of them had two wheels refilled."

St. Joseph, Missouri, was entertained for two days, July 23, and July 24.

Another two-day stand was Atchison on July 26 and 27. The *Daily Champion* ran the following sad story: "Two of the circus hands were 'canned' last night. Missouri Charlie was one and the other was an old circus hostler who had been with this show a month. He says the whole gang took after him with clubs, etc., and threatened to kill him. He went into fits and was picked up in the railroad yards by the police. At the station last night he had thirty spasms. He says there is a piece gone out of his skull and that he goes into fits when frightened."

The *Champion* remarked, "A circus in town two days and not a robbery reported."

In early September the show played a full week in St. Paul, Minnesota. There was talk of touring Alaska in 1898. Two of the show employees, Allen and Clark, claimed to have chartered "the large steamer, 'Rover,' to leave San Diego March 10. The circus will open in Juneau April 2. A week's stand will also be made at Dawson City. This will be Alaska's first circus and the enterprising managers, Messrs. Allen and Clark, expect to coin money."

Nothing came of the grand scheme. Perhaps the bar closed early.

The story from St. Paul cited the excellent show band under the baton of Prof. Will Goodrich.

Wichita expected the show to winter there, but the circus never returned.

The Leavenworth *Evening Standard*, October 25, ran the following: "CIRCUS IS WINTERING HERE, McMahon Bros.' Aggregation Will Occupy the Old Union Foundry Till Spring."

"Several cars, a number of people and a large quantity of stock belonging to McMahon Bros. circus and menagerie arrived in the city yesterday from St. Louis, as told in the STANDARD.

"The show has gone into winter

quarters in the old Union foundry building on Cherokee street between Main and Second Streets and will remain in Leavenworth until the season opens next year.

"Mrs. McMahon is of the party, together with C. D. Allen, the manager of the show. About sixty head of fine horses are already under a tent pitched for them in the lot south of the main building of the foundry. The moulding room of the building is to have a new roof put on and be used as an amphitheatre for a winter circus where performances will be given perhaps twice a week. The elephants, camels, lions, bears, etc., of the menagerie are now with the Walter L. Main Circus under contract until Nov. 6, when they will be shipped to Leavenworth and housed in the foundry building, which has been leased for the winter by Manager Allen.

"The large show wintered heretofore for three seasons in Wichita. By the middle of November Manager Allen hopes to have the entire aggregation housed in the new quarters. The company will leave several thousand dollars in Leavenworth during the season."

The animals leased to Walter L. Main arrived in Leavenworth on November 12. In May the animals joined the Main circus at Lyons, Kansas, but there is no report of the kinds of animals nor the number. The Lyons newspapers made no mention of the arrival of the McMahon animals.

"The city is greatly disturbed," according to the *Wichita Kansas Star*, October 29, "over the report in a St. Louis paper of the action in some town in Missouri last Sunday, when Mr. Carl Allen general manager of the McMahon (sic) dumped over 100 of his people thirteen miles from a station, and had them get out. The friends here of the company are inclined to believe there are two sides to the story, and that Mr. Allen's side will show another version."

The other side of the story was that such abandonment was typical of the McMahon shows.

"A valuable trick dog belonging to McMahon Bros. circus," reported the *Evening Standard*, November 1, "was run over and killed by a Missouri Pacific train yesterday afternoon near the Union passenger station. The accident

caused much grief among the members of the company who are living in their car close by where their pet was killed."

The most sensational news appeared in the *Evening Standard* on November 24: "MARRIED THE AGENT. The Widowed Proprietor of McMahon's Circus is Now Mrs. Clark. WEDDED HER PRESS AGENT YESTERDAY.

"Charles W. Clarke, formerly press agent for McMahon Bros., circus, announced to his acquaintances yesterday afternoon that he was going away on an evening train to be absent a couple of weeks on a wedding tour. He was married in St. Joseph, Mo., yesterday morning to Mrs. McMahon, widow of one of the late proprietors of the circus.

"After the marriage yesterday the couple returned to Leavenworth and left on a night train for Omaha. Later it became known the manager of the show, a man named Allen, had also gone away to remain for an indefinite period and that the saloon and cafe opened less than a month ago at Fourth and Delaware streets by Clarke and known as the Peerless Buffet had been left in the hands of Harry

Hayes, who alleges Clarke gave him a bill of sale for it and he now has possession.

"Allen who was a partner of Clarke in the enterprise went to Chicago last night ostensibly to return in about two weeks and a Mr. Ferguson has been given the business management of the affairs of the circus temporarily.

"Ettenson, Woolfe & Co. issued an attachment today on property in the saloon to secure payment of a bill of \$60 and Dolde & Hartwig, cigarmakers, issued similar papers for property amounting to \$31.

"A man named Sparr from Kansas City is expected on a night train and it is said will settle all indebtedness of the cafe and saloon, the fixtures of which are owned by the Blatz Brewing company.

"Constable Lonergan later secured another attachment in favor of James Foley for \$35 for plumbing."



A story in the *Kansas Star*, Wichita, November 26, related that, "Yesterday the metallic casket containing the remains of Joe McMahon (sic) was removed from its temporary resting place in the vault at Maple Grove, by I. W. Gill in response to a telegram received from Mrs. McMahon at Omaha. On the late Missouri Pacific train the zinc sarcophagus was shipped by express without an attendant to Omaha. There the remains were received by Mrs. McMahon and taken right through to Delavan, Wis., his old home town, to be interred in their final resting place. This is the last scene of the sad tragedy which shook Wichita last April."

The *Kansas Commoner*, Wichita, reported that, "the bereaved widow of a few short months combined pleasure and duty by taking the remains of her late husband on the same trip which carried her on her wedding tour with her new husband."

The *Evening Standard*, December 15, ran the following: "THE M'MAHON CIRCUS SOLD. Ringling Bros. Buy the Show and Will Take it Away Tonight.

"McMahon Bros. circus, which was in winter quarters here, was today sold to F. S. Fisher and Ringling Bros. and will be packed and moved tonight.

"Mrs. Leonora (sic) McMahon, its last proprietor, married her advance agent and left leaving the property in the hands of another employee."

The next day the *Standard* commented, "At the corner of Second and Cherokee streets this forenoon it looked as if a circus was in town. The wagons of the McMahon circus were standing there in a row preparatory to moving them to Denver."

There was no identification of F. S. Fisher and no explanation of the move to Denver.

On December 20 the *Standard* reported that, "A ring horse valued at \$700 belonging to the McMahon circus was attached Saturday to secure payment of a bill of \$25.10 for hay sold the circus by Farmer Vaudan. The horse was replevined by the owners who claimed they were not trying to evade payment of the bill."

"The McMahon circus," the *Kansas Commoner*, Wichita, reported on Jan-

uary 12, 1898, "has about passed into history. An old circus car which has stood in the yards here all summer was attached last week by the proprietor of the Manhattan hotel on a board bill for \$63."

There is confusion concerning the disposal of the McMahon equipment despite the announced purchase by Ringling and F. S. Fisher and the subsequent shipment to Denver.

The *Carbondalian*, Carbondale, Kansas, on April 9, 1898, announced that, "Mr. J. M. Barry wishes to state that he will open his mammoth menagerie and circus in this city on April 16th. Mr. Barry has doubled the size of his Great American Shows by the purchase of almost the complete show of McMahon Bros., during the past winter. Among the purchases are nine trick horses, that are known to be the best in the United States. Mr. Barry says that he will put on the road the largest and best wagon show in the United States, and he promises our citizens a great treat. Mr. B. has opened his shows in this city for the past five years and he has never failed to please."

On November 3, 1900 the *New York Clipper* reported that Walter J. McDonald's Combined Colossal Shows of Abilene, Kansas, had "purchased all of the late Joe McMahon show baggage wagons, tableaux, dens, etc. To go out on rails on about 12 cars. 65 horses on show. Ten horse dapple gray team on bandwagon."

The last word on Lenora McMahon Clarke was a statement in the *Wichita Commoner*, July 14, 1898, that "Joe McMahon's widow is running a show on the Omaha exposition grounds."

The report that Ringlings had purchased the McMahon show was misleading. The only purchase recorded was two bears from the menagerie.

The Leavenworth *Evening Standard*, December 27, reported, "A LIVELY TIME WITH A BEAR."

"A dispatch from Milwaukee, Wis., says a huge cinnamon bear shipped by express from Leavenworth to Baraboo, Wis., escaped from its crate in the express car at Western Union junction on the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul railroad Christmas day while en route to his destination. The express messenger was driven from his car, the bear taking

complete possession, devouring packages of apples and candy and devouring the way bills. When the train arrived in Milwaukee it took ten men to secure the vicious animal.

"This is the same bear that escaped from his cage at the union depot in Kansas City Thursday night roaming about through the Hannibal railroad yards. Two bears were shipped from Leavenworth to Ringling's circus at its winter quarters in Wisconsin recently. One of them was very quiet and gentle and was easily handled, but the other was cross and fretful and made plenty of trouble when an attempt was made to cage him for the shipment. The cages were flimsy ones for such a purpose and when the bear was moved out of the car at the depot in Kansas City he was angry and seized the bars and braces of the cage and crushed them with ease. When he escaped the expressmen and all others rushed from the depot platform as if a plague had hit it and there was a very insecure feeling there all night. The bear was lassoed in the Hannibal roundhouse the next morning with three ropes and dragged back to his cage. It was fitted with heavy braces and then started to its destination after the messenger who took him out was well posted about the roving spirit he had developed.

"The bears were in the custody of the Pacific Express company and this was one of two that were sold to Ringling Bros. by W. B. Ferguson manager for the MacMahon (sic) Bros. circus. It was shipped from here the evening of Dec. 23 to the Ringling's at Baraboo, Wis. The pair of bears were bought for \$500. The one in question is a young one and brought \$200. When its cage was loaded in the express car at the union depot here the cage was too large for the car door and it was necessary to tip it to one side. This made bruin angry and he tried then to get out, bending several of the iron bars of the cage. Charles Lehn, an employee of the local express office who helped load the animal had to crawl over the cage to get out of the car. As he did so the bear reached for him through the bars and startled him so that he leaped into the air. The train was moving away at the time and Lehn fell headlong to the platform and narrowly escaped falling under the wheels. He was so badly bruised that he was scarcely able to work the next day."

There is no business like show business.

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12. THE HOLLYWOOD PALACE 1970. Hosted by Bing Crosby this fantastic final show features highlights of the dozens of circus and variety performers who appeared on the program. Favorites the 8 RODOS and trapeze star CANDY CAVARETTA perform their complete routines. 60 MIN

13. INTERNATIONAL SHOWTIME 1964. Host Don Ameche takes you on a personal visit with one of Europe's best circuses. First highlights of TROLLE RHODIN'S Swedish circus with Ringling favorite Helena Rassy and her classy trained doves and juggling routines, the Hillano's Poodles, Rhodin's Elephants and Trolle himself working the Liberty Horses. 60 MIN

14. INTERNATIONAL SHOWTIME 1963. Host Don Ameche conducts another tour this time to the Italian Big Top Giant TOGNI FAMILY CIRCUS. Caesar Togni and sons present the fabulous horse and elephant routines now known world-wide. Plus classic comedy, aerial and ground artists round out this highly entertaining hour at the circus. 60 MIN

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